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Charles Dickens before 1850, with especial reference to the
Child Figure in 'Barnaby Rudge' 'The Old Curiosity Shop'
and 'Dombey and Son'.

VOL I. I

Ph.D. 1973

Robert Giddings

Postgraduate Student at the University of Keele.

Declaration

I declare that this work is my own account of my research. Throughout the text and notes I have clearly specified my debt to the work of other scholars in Dickens studies. I gladly acknowledge the instinted encouragement and involved interest shown me throughout this undertaking by my supervisor, John Killham Esquire M.A., of the Department of English in the University of Keele. The patience and resource of the Librarians and staff at the University of Keele, of the Central Reference Library in Bath, of the City of Bath Technical College must not pass without due gratitude and acknowledgement.

Signed:.....

Robert Giddings

26th: September, 1973

Abstract

This is a study of three of Dickens' early novels which all contain a centrally important treatment of a child figure. The aim has been to demonstrate how Dickens uses the figure of the child to explore the deep changes in life, in society, in human relationships in the early 19th century and to show he created an imaginative prose vehicle, part fantasy, part dream, part emblem-symbol, adequate to present his comment and vision of early Victorian England. Emphasis is placed on the continuity of Dickens' work, in an attempt to erode the contemporary tendency to divide his work into "early Dickens" and "late Dickens". The opening section is intended to show how important the child-figure is to an understanding of Dickens' art, and that Dickens uses the child-figure both personally and collectively: that the child-figure means a great deal to him because he carried permanently with him the intense memories of his own childhood, and also because he uses the child-figure and operates on the level of the collective archetypal subconsciousness, and uses the child as an emblem of man lost in an alienated world which is grown indifferent to him. The next chapter discusses the importance of the modern city as the major scene of Dickens' narratives. The following sections are an examination of The Old Curiosity Shop which begins with a discussion of the moment when it appeared: this is followed by a detailed treatment of the figure of Little Nell which stresses her 'divine child' characteristics. This section concludes with a discussion of the other main character and elements in the novel as well as the use of pastoral theme. The sections on Barnaby Rudge begin with a discussion of the political elements in this novel and the political movements current during its composition. Then follows a detailed account of the use Dickens makes of the figure of Barnaby. The section ends with an examination of the mob and the various leading figures in this novel, and the relation between the social and the family themes.

A short chapter, Christmas, New Year and 'Dombey', underlines the important links between the Christmas Books and Dombey and Son and leads on to the section The Anatomy of 'Dombey', which deals with the complex of elements which make up that masterpiece of Dickens' early maturity. A consideration of the profoundly important use of the figure of Paul and Florence follows and the dissertation concludes with a pulling together of the main themes of Dickens' work in the decade which ended in with the composition of Dombey and Son. Throughout the study the attempt is made to draw attention to the cohesiveness of Dickens' imagination, by a detailed interest in Dickens' symbols and emblems - stars, animals, water, time-pieces - which give his vision that haunting and impressive wholeness. There are three appendices which deal with Macready's production of King Lear, which probably influenced Dickens' creation of The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge, with the songs and ballads used to present Dick Swiveller and lastly with the main financial scandals and swindles of the time.

A Note

It would be as well to comment on the circumstances under which this study was written. The author is disabled (polio/Wheelchair) and this has frequently made use of texts in various libraries rather difficult. Wherever possible I have made all references to the same text and the same edition. Where this has not been the case, it is hoped the reader will understand the effects of circumstances.

CHARLES DICKENS
BEFORE 1850

with special reference
to the child figure

in

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

BARNABY RUDGE

and

DOMBEY AND SON

Charles Dickens in 1841, from a drawing by Count D'Orsay.

"I feel my power now more than ever I did. That I know, if I have health, I could sustain my place in the minds of thinking men, though fifty writers started up tomorrow..."
Dickens in a letter to Forster, 2nd November 1843.



DICKENS IN 1841

CONTENTS OF VOLUME ONE

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	II
Chapter 1: CHARLES DICKENS - THE MYTHMAKER OF SOCIAL CHANGE	1
Chapter 2: THE CITY CHILD	45
Chapter 3: THE WORLD OF NELL	66
Chapter 4: THE DIVINITY OF NELL	91
Chapter 5: PASTORAL CONVENTION IN "THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP"	127
Chapter 6: THE SHOP AND ITS CUSTOMERS	149
Chapter 7: THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD OF "BARNABY RUDGE"	187
Chapter 8: "BARNABY RUDGE" - A CASE HISTORY	220
Chapter 9: THE MOB AND ITS LEADERS	261
Chapter 10: FACES IN THE CROWD	295
Chapter 11: CHRISTMAS, NEW YEAR AND "DOMBEY AND SON"	334
Chapter 12: THE ANATOMY OF "DOMBEY AND SON"	357
Chapter 13: PAUL AND FLORENCE	424
Chapter 14: CHILD, FATHER AND MAN	468
Appendices: (A) MACREADY'S "KING LEAR"	500
(B) THE DICK SWIVELLER SONG-BOOK	508
(C) DICKENS AND THE AGE OF SWINDLE	523

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Charles Dickens in 1841	Frontispiece	
Charles Dickens giving a Public Reading	To follow page 6	
Walter Landor Dickens	"	8
Thomas Carlyle as a Young Man	"	12
The Sweat Shop	"	25
Young Gulliver and the Brobdingnag Minister	"	37
The Milk of Poor Law "Kindness"	"	43
Capital and Labour	"	56
Frontispiece to <u>Master Humphrey's Clock</u> ..	"	68
Catherine Dickens, her sister Georgina Hogarth and Charles Dickens (1842)	"	74
Charles Dickens Reading <u>The Chimes</u>	"	76
Rioters Seen at Night	"	81
The Apotheosis of Little Nell	"	97
"When I die put near me something that has loved the light and had the sky above it always"	"	122
Dick Swiveller, Fred Trent and Grandfather	"	164
The Modern Milo	"	204
Barnaby in Newgate	"	222
Barnaby in the Country with his Mother ..	"	258
Scene during The Gordon Riots	"	275
Excesses in The Gordon Riots	"	285
Hugh of the Maypole	"	300
Sir John Chester and his Son	"	305
Original Cover of <u>Dombey and Son</u>	"	362
Frontispiece to the first complete edition of <u>Dombey and Son</u> (1848)	"	365
Suggested Original of the Dombey Mansion ..	"	374
Suggested Site of The Wooden Midshipman ..	"	376
Dick Whittington at the Lyceum Theatre (1845)	"	393

Thomas Potter Cooke in <u>Black-Eyed Susan</u>	..	"	395
The Railway Dragon	"	401
The Railway Juggernaut of 1845	"	405
The Great Land Serpent!	"	406
A Stag Arrested at Railway	"	408
The Stag at Bay	"	409
Constructing the Euston Line (1838)	"	412
Entrance Portico, Euston Grove Station	..	"	414
Building the Stationary Engine House, Camden Town (1839)	"	416
The Stags: A Drama of Today	"	419
Monument to a Defunct Railway Line	"	421
"Stag" Stalking in Capel Court	"	423
Little Paul	"	431
"What are the wild waves saying?"	"	439
Charles Dickens in 1849	"	498
Macready as "King Lear"	"	503
The Railway Speculator "At Home"	"	525
Hudson as Leporello	"	526

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens lived and worked in the period of time which really marks the beginning of what we would recognise as the modern world. A way of life which had lasted for centuries was changing, was going forever. From growing things, man changed to making things, and selling the things he made. The mechanization of life, the coarsening effects of buying and selling on the human soul became one of the leading themes of nineteenth century literature.

Money was to become the lodestar of the age. Coleridge sensed it at the opening of the new century; the commercial spirit, he felt, had become "the paramount principle of action in the nation at large." (1). By 1829 John Sterling was compelled to apostrophise wealth as "the god of the nineteenth century! The golden idol! The mighty Mammon! Such are the accents of the time, such the cry of the nation..." (2). Before the third decade of the new century was out, J.S. Mill was writing to warn d'Eichthal, the Saint Simonian prophet, not to expect too much of the English when he came to spread his message; you might be impressed by the English politically, he told him, and with "the superiority of the English to the French in all those qualities by which a nation is enabled to turn its productive and commercial resources to the best account" but this superiority was "closely connected with the very worst point in our national character, the disposition to sacrifice everything to accumulation, and that exclusive and engrossing selfishness which accompanies it..." (3). John Henry Newman, in the year of Pickwick, confessed that he did not know anything more dreadful "than a state of mind which is,

perhaps, the characteristic of this century, and which the prosperity of this country so miserably fosters. I mean that ambitious spirit...that low ambition which sets everyone on the lookout to succeed and to rise in life, to amass money ...to depress rivals, to triumph over his hitherto superiors, to effect a consequence and a gentility which he had not had before..." (4).

Disraeli perceived just the same greed and materialism around him, he asks "who will deny that a spirit of rapacious covetousness, desecrating all the humanities of life" has not been the besetting sin of England for the last century and a half, and "since the passing of the Reform Act the altar of Mammon has blazed with triple worship. To acquire, to accumulate, to plunder...to propose a Utopia to consist only of Wealth and Toil, this has been the breathless business of enfranchised England..." (5).

Even the public conveniences at the Great Exhibition made a profit. The First Report of the Commissioners of the Exhibition of 1851 goes through in minute detail all the figures and facts of the Waiting and Washing Rooms - the total cost was £1,600 and "The current expenditure (Superintendent, 6 Male Attendants, 10 Female) was £671.17.3; current receipts £2,441.15.9. Excess of receipts over expenditure, £1,769.18.6... These statements will show...such establishments may be made perfectly remunerative..." (6)

Carlyle devoted himself to attacking the "cash-nexus" of

Victorian life. By the early 1840's he had come to see that, of all things, financial failure was dreaded the most: "What is it that the modern English soul does, in very truth, dread, infinitely, and contemplate with entire despair? - the Terror of 'Not Succeeding'...of not making money, fame, or some other figure in the world, chiefly of not making money! Is not that a somewhat singular Hell?" (7).

A fine example of this code of success is Kingsley's Lord Minchampstead in Yeast (1848) who "had carved out his own way through life, and opened his oyster - the world, neither with sword nor pen, but with steam and cotton... From mill-owner he grew to coal-owner, ship-owner, banker, railway director, money-lender to kings and princes... He had half a dozen estates in as many different counties..." (8). The striving spirit animated Alton Locke's uncle in Alton Locke (1850) who, although he began life as a clerk, married his master's widow, and "rose and rose...till he was owner of a first-rate grocery establishment in the City..." (9). The hero's employer we are told, had been "fired with the great spirit of the nineteenth century...(and) resolved to make haste to be rich..." (10). By the time Thackeray writes The Newcomes (1853) he has no doubt as to what the age really admires; the Victorian world "huzzas at prosperity and turns away from misfortune as from contagious disease..." (11). Thackeray also savagely describes the barbarity of commercial competition: "To push on in the crowd, every male or female struggler must use his or her shoulders. If a better place than yours presents itself just beyond your neighbour, elbow him out and take it..."

What a man has to do in society is to assert himself. Is there a good place at table? Take it. At the Treasury or Home Office? Ask for it... What matters if you are considered obtrusive, provided that you obtrude? By pushing steadily, nine hundred and ninety-nine people in a thousand will yield to you... You may be sure of success. If your neighbour's foot obstructs you, stamp on it; and do you suppose he won't take it away?..." (12).

Although Mrs. Gaskell is careful not to portray Mr. Thornton's business methods with such savagery, she does show how much he comes to enjoy his wealth, to lord it almost: he makes a success in factories "to a level from which he might see and read the great game of worldly success, and honestly command more power and influence than in any other mode of life..." The date is 1855, only two years after The Newcomes, but it is now respectable. (13). "Far away, in the East and in the West, where his person would never be known, his name was to be regarded, and his wishes to be fulfilled, and his word pass like gold. That was the idea of merchant-life which Mr. Thornton had started. 'Her merchants be life princes' said his mother, reading the text aloud, as if it were a trumpet-call to invite her boy to the struggle..." (14). And Mrs. Gaskell assures us in the same passage that he was "but like many others" - and, one assumes, none the worse for that. One is reminded, quite understandably, of Matthew Arnold's Mrs. Gooch's Golden Rule, "Ever remember, my dear Dan, that you should look forward to being someday manager of that concern..." (15). The doctrine of Self-Help (16), produced, of

course, a new species of Homo Sapiens - Homo Pugilistica, man the fighter, described by J.W. Stapleton in The Great Crime of 1860 as a striving wrestler "strong and resolute...naked, slippery, suspicious, on his guard; the living incarnation of concentrated selfishness, modelled by the nineteenth century.. ." (17).

Anthony Trollope in the character of Sir Roger Scratcherd showed how easy it was in an acquisitive and grasping society to rise from being "a drunken stone-mason in Barchester" to becoming "a great man in the world. He had become a contractor, first for little things, such as a mile or so of a railway embankment, or three or four canal bridges, and then a contractor for great things, such as Government hospitals, locks, docks and quays... He had been occasionally in partnership with one man for one thing, and then another for another; but had, on the whole, kept his own interests to himself, and now...was a very rich man..." But in Dr. Thorne (1858) Trollope does not make his successful man pleasant or refined, his success was not quite respectable, the novelist goes to some trouble to underline the fact that Scratcherd, although he may have become rich, knighted and one of those "whom the king delighteth to honour" his old, coarse, habits remain: "while conquering the world Roger Scratcherd had not conquered his old bad habits...he was the same man at all points that he had been when formerly seen about the streets...with his stone-mason's apron tucked up round his waist." (18).

Herbert Spencer, writing at the end of the 1850's, had

come to perceive that Victorians from their infancy were indoctrinated with "the idea that wealth and expenditure are two sides of the same thing" and that they prompted "the expenditure of all their energies in money-making..." (19). William Kaye, writing in The Cornhill Magazine in 1860, spoke for the nation when he proclaimed "I have a great opinion of successful men; and I am not ashamed to confess it. It was the fashion, some years ago, to sneer at Success... But a healthier social philosophy is now enthroned among us. We have begun to think that men who make their way to the front, becoming rich or famous...must after all, have something in them..." (20).

Money, indeed, became the chief agent of denouement as the century progressed. Gerald Griffin's novel The Collegians was first published in 1829. It tells the sad story of the love of Hardress Cregan for the beautiful Eily Mavourneen, the "Colleen Bawn" (the fair girl). She is below his station of life but he secretly marries her. Under the influence of his mother - whose family fortunes are dwindling - he later courts, and wins, a richer match. He connives at the murder of his first (secret) wife and is arrested on the eve of his marriage to his second love. Thirty years later it was turned into a play by Dion Boucicault, The Colleen Bawn (1860) and into an opera by Sir Julius Benedict The Lilly of Killarney (1862) where the problems are happily resolved - Eily saved, lovers re-united, fortunes secured.

Bulwer Lytton's play Money (1840) carried the moral that financial reward can be the here-and-now reward of virtue and

humility and finds Evelyn and Clara together at the final curtain maybe no sadder, or wiser, but certainly richer than before. Despite his brave protests about the coarse materialism of the age, Oscar Wilde's early success An Ideal Husband (1895) shows again the unenticing spectacle of a hero having his cake and being allowed to eat it. It is hard to believe that this play is, in fact, a later work than Shaw's original and biting anti-capitalist drama Widowers' Houses. (21).

The ethos of the century is probably best epitomised in those four profound novels of George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (1860), Felix Holt (1866), Middlemarch (1871-2) and Daniel Deronda (1874-6). (22).

The kindest and most beautiful arguments against the mounting tides of Victorian materialism were, I believe, Ruskin's, and found at their best in Unto this Last (1860-2), which appeared in The Cornhill Magazine. Thackeray, the magazine's Editor, discontinued the publication of these essays after a public outcry. The prophet had to wait for his countrymen's honour. (23). Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861) says in his revised version of Decalogue:

Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat

When it's so lucrative to cheat...

Thou shalt not covet, but tradition

Approves all forms of competition.

But it is probably Fagin who provides the motto for the whole age when he says, "Some conjurors say that number three is the magic number, and some say number seven. It's neither, my

friend. It's number one."

Although Dickens' writings are a lasting indictment of the materialism and greed of the age, a materialism which - as Professor Randolph Quirk has suggested the novelist was able actually to echo in language, to reproduce the very tone of the period where syntax takes up calculating postures (24) - it is not until we come to the novels between and including The Old Curiosity Shop and Dombey and Son that we really find Dickens' vision of society widening and taking on depth, producing a feeling of disquiet and mistrust of the ambitions and ethics of Victorian England. It is of course the traditional attitude of the literary artist to question and criticise the society of his time and the novels mainly concerned in this study constitute the valuable apprenticeship Dickens served before producing his major social statements.

I cannot accept Edmund Wilson's statement that "Pickwick, from the moment it gets really underway, heads by instinct and, as it were, unconsciously straight for the Fleet Prison..." (25). The point I am trying to make is that Chester, Trent, Pecksniff, Filer and Dombey, lead inevitably to the vision of society which plainly lurks in the ideas discussed by Forster in his Life of Charles Dickens in the section called "Hints for Books Written and Unwritten 1855-1865". Forster bases his section on the Book of Memoranda which Dickens habitually began to use in January 1855: "In it were put down any hints or suggestions that occurred to him" Forster recorded, "A mere piece of imagery or fancy, it might be at one time; at another

the outline of a subject or a character; then a bit of description or dialogue; no order or sequence being observed in any." (26). And here, randomly and unselectively assembled, we penetrate Dickens' innermost doubts and misgivings about Victorian England.

These themes, ideas, motifs - call them what we will - provoke a more immediate reaction than a fully realized novel. Obviously so, for they are simple, direct observations. Part of the ideas for Little Dorrit for example: "Full length portrait of his lordship, surrounded by worshippers...sensible men enough, agreeable men enough, independent men enough... but the moment they begin to circle round my lord, and to shine with a borrowed light from his lordship, heaven and earth, how mean and subservient. What a competition for outbidding of each other in servility!" (27). And another one, which Forster attests Dickens clung to but "when he came to close quarters with it, the difficulties were found to be too great." (28). The idea was obviously to study the anonymous, faceless, exploited millions who slaved unknown and behind the scenes to create the superficial glory of Victorian England: "English landscape. The beautiful prospect, trim fields, clipped hedges, everything so neat and orderly, gardens, houses, roads. Where are the people who do all this? There must be a great many of them, to do it. Where are they all? and are they, too, so well kept and so fair to see?..." (29). We should note, I think, that the idea of anonymity continued to fascinate Dickens, there is Nobody's Story, Somebody's Luggage, in The Christmas Stories and the original title of Little Dorrit

had been Nobody's Fault. (30). Nobody's Story (1853) concludes: "If you were ever in the Belgian villages near the field of Waterloo, you will have seen in some quiet little church, a monument erected by faithful companions in arms to the memory of Colonel A, Major B, Captains C, D and E, Lieutenants F and G, Ensigns H, I and J, seven non-commissioned officers, and one hundred and thirty rank and file, who fell in the discharge of their duty... The story of Nobody is the story of the rank and file of the earth. They bear their share of the battle; they have their part in the victory; they fall; they leave no name but in the mass. The march of the proudest of us, leads to the dusty way by which they go..." (31).

In discussing the effects of the Crimean War on the English people, Dickens refers to "...we, the million, who have no individuality as a million, or as a corporation, or as a regiment, though as Mr. A, or my lord B, or Alderman C, or Private D, we each may suffer, and have our private griefs; we the Nobody Everybody, to whom nothing is anything to speak of..." (32). To this line of thinking Forster is able to add "a fancy that savours of the same mood of discontent political and social, Dickens, he says, noted in his Book of Memoranda: "How do I know that I, a man, am to learn from insects - unless it is to learn how little my littlenesses are? All that botheration in the hive about the queen bee, may be, in little, me and the Court Circular." (33).

Another, and with Dickens almost obsessional idea: "the houseful of Toadies and Humbugs. They all know and despise

one another; but partly to keep their hands in, and partly to make out their own individual cases - pretend not to know one another." (34). And one which strikes fundamentally to the roots of the Victorian social order: "People realizing immense sums of money, imaginatively - speculatively - counting their chickens before hatched. Inflaming each other's imaginations about great gains of money, and entering a sort of tangible, impossible competition as to who is the richer." (35). These ideas must have been continually in his mind, they fall from Dickens' pen: "The swell establishment, frightfully mean and miserable in all but the reception rooms. Those very showy." (36). A far remove from the world of Pickwick!

When considering Dickens' total output, it is usual to divide the works into "the early novels" and "the late novels". This point is well made by Lauriat Lane "...until very recently it was almost possible to divide Dickens' critics into those who felt that David Copperfield was Dickens' last great novel and those who felt that Bleak House was his first great one..." (37). What I am trying to establish is that from the earliest novels on, right through his novels and stories, there is a continuing and developing vision, and that the whole corpus of his work is thematically, if not artistically, consistent and coherent. I believe that Dickens wrote about man's relation to money, and the varying social and individual consequences of financial obsession. I find that this is present as much in The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-1841) as it is in Our Mutual Friend (1864-1865) and it is this, not Dickens' attacks on specific social abuses such as the law, or government, or

education, which gives his works a kind of permanent validity. I think Professor Barbara Hardy's description is apter. She says that the later novels are more "detailed and documentary" in their portraits of society, and not so mythical. (38).

There is throughout Dickens' work an unmistakable selection of interests and attitudes, based on a set of basic assumptions which do not really alter so much as intensify and sharpen. This has been well said by Monroe Engel, I think: "No writer of great stature has kept more persistently to his own themes than did Dickens. They inform his writing from first to last, welling from the great, brooding, obsessive centre of his mind's most fertile life to inspire his work with its most intense energies... Dickens almost never repeats himself...behind all that he writes is a point of view that develops...but does not change essentially." (39). What gives the novels a continuing thematic texture Engel describes as in terms of "recurrent configurations of experience..." (40).

The period spanned by Dickens' working life coincided with the finalisation of the upheavals which have created "modern Britain". His life-span covers the period of Britain's "greatest" imperial, industrial and commercial exploits and achievements. If he describes what he saw in the England around him critically, then it could be argued that he is a critic of modern society. This general, almost fundamental view of society present in Dickens' fiction has been often noted before, but not, I think, applied to more than one or two novels at a time. Lionel Trilling, writing of Little Dorrit

disorder, but our order that is horrible..." (44) and of the later novels in particular he said "...the occasional indignation has spread and deepened into a passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world. Here you will find no more villains and heroes, but only oppressors and victims...driven by a huge machinery which grinds to pieces the people it should nourish..." (45).

As Humphry House has demonstrated, it is difficult to make out a case for Dickens' being a radical reformer who attacks specific abuses, he describes him as "following, rather than leading, public opinion" (46) and this seems to hit on the head the idea of the burning social reformer of T.A. Jackson's Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical (1937). An earlier, and I believe very neglected critic of Dickens, (47) Professor W. Dibelius, attempted to demonstrate that Dickens' contribution to radical literature was not in his ability to point to particular failings and inefficiencies in our social system, but his gift at organising, centralizing, public opinion: that he somehow was able to act as a rallying point for truly liberal idealism. Dibelius believed that Dickens originated no single reform, and that the several reforming movements which he eventually came to support were well under way before he wrote a word: Dickens lacked so many essential qualities as a leader of reforming movements, but to the English liberal reformers Dickens was a priceless ally, because of his magnetic literary personality, he achieved the position almost of a reforming preacher (Prediger) of progress and effort to whom all listened, the man who inspired, inflamed the public to realize that something serious must be done. (48).

Even if it is granted that Dickens is not a satirist who points his finger at the specific evils of society, and in his novels has contributed a permanent indictment of modern society, very few critics are willing to admit that Dickens did this much before the middle eighteen-fifties. (49). "Dickens was supposed to be an extremely popular person, always on the side of the people against the ruling classes... Yet Dickens gives no more quarter to democracy than Ruskin. He begins by unmasking superficial abuses like the Court of Chancery and imprisonment for debt, imagining them to be fundamental abuses. Then, suddenly discovering it is the whole framework of society that is wrong, he writes Hard Times, and after that becomes a prophet as well as a storyteller..." (50). The key-word here is "suddenly" as my belief is that although the later novels may be more subtle, more symbolic, more visionary even, Dickens' grasp of what was actually going on - and going wrong - in society may be evidenced much earlier than the publication of Hard Times. The earlier novels and stories, and the later, so-called "gloomy" novels are linked together by the continuity of themes, above all by "money" themes. Dickens' novels present to me the longest series of works about the effects of money on human beings and the kind of social environment human beings create around themselves.

For me one of Dickens' greatest achievements is his creation of a kind of narrative prose fiction capable of exploring the modern world, of apprehending the real and rendering the real to us imaginatively. He ventures upon totally new ground, because the world he lived in was a new world, a world which was changing all the time: the prose vehicle of Jane

Austen or Sir Walter Scott was quite unsuited to the experiencing journeys he was to make.

Dickens seems to be all things to all men, in experiencing what Dickens wrote, we each of us create a Dickens of our own. For Edmund Wilson he is a tortured schizo-phrenic-manic-depressive and would-be criminal (51) but to G.K. Chesterton he is an Uncle Holly. (52). To A.O.J. Cockshut he is a totally inexplicable phenomenon, an ignorant "maker" chanting his wood-notes wild. (53). For Dorothy van Ghent Dickens , appears as a trailer for Proust. (54). Viewing him as an opponent of prison reform, an overt friend of the poor with marked snobbish tendencies, Professor Collins sees the allegedly "radical" Dickens as a furtive Tory. (55). But there is much evidence for Dickens' belief that there were some social issues which should be taken over and controlled by the state, and not left to "the chapter of accidents" and the champions of laissez faire, education noticeably among them. (56). I suppose in a conservative age like ours, we respond to conservative heroes, admire conservative artists and we tend to distort past figures into modern conservatives. Thus it has been with Dickens. But Professor Collins' Monday Club Dickens just won't do. It is all very well to quote the evidence of Queen Victoria's views on Dickens as if this conclusively proves Dickens' Toryism. (57) But how can we square this with the heart-felt comments of William Lovett, Chartist, political rioter, promoter of Co-operation, several times imprisoned for anti-police activities and sedition; when he heard of Dickens' death he said that the author was one who

could be badly spared from among us when so much remains to be done, that he "(had) done more to expose wrong and injustice and to improve society socially and politically than any other worker or writer of the present century..." (58).

The other side of the political scale finds the pre-cursor of Marx envisaged by T.A. Jackson and E.W. Pugh. (59). George Orwell presents him as a friend to all that the best of Fabians would hold dear, Dickens is always campaigning about something, and is "a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is generously angry...a nineteenth century liberal, a free intelligence..." (60). For Orwell, Dickens was out against an expression on the human face (61) although it is hard to reconcile this man with the Dickens who callously describes a serving girl as one who "might have passed for the neglected daughter of a superannuated dustman in very reduced circumstances..." (62). Most critics writing after the publication of Wilson's essay have firmly replaced the jolly philanthropical Dickens of the fireside and the stagecoach, of Sam Weller and Mr. Micawber, with the dark, tortured Dostoyevskyan symbolist of dust-heaps and prisons. And we find over ten years after Wilson's original impeachment, Robert Stange passes on Dickens a further Act of Attainder: "Profound and suggestive as is Dickens' treatment of guilt and expiation (in Great Expectations) to trace its remoter implications is to find something excessive and idiosyncratic... Dickens remarked to a friend that he felt always as if he were wanted by the police - 'irretrievably tainted'...the Dickens of the later novels seems

to be obsessed with guilt..." We might guess that the cadence would clinch the argument with the magic name of Dostoevsky, and we are not disappointed; "...Great Expectations...finds its analogues...in the writings of that other irretrievably tainted artist, Fyodor Dostoevski." (63). This is the Dickens of Lionel Trilling, Morton Dauwen Zabel, Jack Lindsay, Donald Fanger, Mark Spilka - where, for most of the time, it seems very much to be a case of "for Dickens read 'Kafka'..." (64). By the end of the nineteenth century, the reactions against Dickens had firmly set in, and significantly enough, the attitude had hardened particularly against the later novels. The age felt itself superior to Dickens' vulgarity, and to bourgeois appeal. And the genius? The genius, the animating spirit which had conceived an entire world? It was a genius of the common mould, "it might have proceeded from a very superior bagman, - bagman of genius". (65). From the bagman of genius we have now progressed to the Punch and Judy man of Robert Garis. (66).

Each of these critics might be writing about entirely different authors, whose only common feature is the name. There is similar critical discord about the individual novels (67) and even at this remove in time we still do not have Dickens established as a true classic, some prefer the early Dickens and regard David Copperfield as his last great novel, others see Bleak House as his first real novel. Pride of place is offered variously to Little Dorrit, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend. Lilly thought Pickwick was the only memorable book Dickens wrote, and was echoed in our own century

by Hugh Kingsmill, (68), and Dr. Leavis at one time considered Hard Times the only one fit to occupy an adult mind. (69).

For Dr. Leavis all roads in what he called the great tradition led to D.H. Lawrence. Life was too short to spend any time reading Fielding or Mr. Priestley (70) and Dickens was shoved into an Appendix. (71). This was, at any rate, the state of the parties until the centenary year of 1970. There were signs of a gradual relaxation of this almost pontiffical ban before this date. In 1967 in his Introduction to Peter Coveney's The Image of Childhood, Dr. Leavis describes Little Dorrit as Dickens' "greatest work" and further spoke of the need for "getting the greatness of Dickens recognised as it ought to be". Dickens, he said then, was "among the very greatest writers". By 1969 he felt sufficiently bold to bracket him with Blake - "Blake - who points forward to the Dickens of Hard Times (and not merely of Hard Times)." (72). In a letter in The Spectator he had confessed that he "would without hesitation surrender the whole oeuvre of Flaubert for Dombey and Son or Little Dorrit. In Spring 1962 he published a critical article on Dombey in The Sewanee Review. (73). The great renegado's last move came in the Autumn of 1970 when Dickens the Novelist, written in collaboration with his wife, came out - with no mention of eating his own words or taking anything back. They claimed that their purpose was to "enforce as unanswerably as possible the conviction that Dickens was one of the greatest of creative writers; that with the intelligence inherent in creative genius, he developed a fully conscious devotion to his art, becoming as a popular and fecund,

but yet profound, serious and wonderfully resourceful practising novelist, a master of it; and that, as such, he demands a critical attention he has not had." (74). He demands a critical attention he has not had indeed! Not had from the Leavises is clearly meant here; as Leslie Staples observed "Well might it be said there is more joy in heaven..." (75). The power of such negative criticism should not be underestimated, like some kind of nerve gas it paralysed Dickens studies in Cambridge for years. (76). Professor Philip Collins confided in The Dickensian that he had read no Dickens while an undergraduate there "though the literary period which... attracted me was the Victorian". (77). For Lionel Trilling it was quite clear that Dickens was one of the two greatest English novelists, "the other is Jane Austen". He was quite sure, also, that no one was any longer under any illusion about Dickens. (78).

Although there is a seeming diversity of opinion, it is possible, with surprisingly little adjustment, to bring these views together into some fundamental cohesion. The benign qualities stressed by Chesterton do not cancel out the violence in his imagination illuminated by Wilson. Cockshut is right to point out the common, vulgar quality of his mind, this gave him the mass appeal equalled by no other novelist I know of. This is the Dickens so well characterised by Morton Dauwen Zabel as "(the) laureate of the English hearth, saint of Victorian domesticity, the aging dreamer depicted in a celebrated picture surrounded by the fairies, gnomes and ogres of his benevolent imagination..." (79) and so snobbishly lamented by Leslie Stephen. (80).

Mr. Popular Sentiment he might have become, but by the 1850's he had taken "his place beside Scott as a national possession". (81). But we should acknowledge that hand in hand with "the common touch" owned by Dickens there goes a subtle and complex mind able to use simple narrative with the added dimension operative on an archetypal symbolic level. Dickens also had the true journalist's gift of giving the public what they wanted. A modern critic of the press has asserted that the fundamental ingredients of modern popular journalism are Crime, Love, Money and Food. (82). It is true to say that these are the major themes of Dickens' fiction, violence, sentiment, the obsession with money and the centrality of the family group - the latter almost a religion with Dickens, which is celebrated with the ritual of communal eating. Every novel contains some element of crime and violence, the novelist's name has become a byword for sentimentalism, most of his characters are dominated by the money-urge, either money grubbers like Scrooge, Ralph, Tigg, or hypocrites like Chadband, Pecksniff, or mean people like the tight Barkis who dies clutching his money box, or unfortunates like Micawber, Tetterby or Cratchit whose very lack of money compels them to be obsessed with it.

Dickens' obvious love of conviviality, demonstrated by the many scenes in his novels of family meals or social gatherings, is an essential part of his philosophy of human behaviour, his recognition that the intrinsic loneliness of life calls out for alleviation by companionship, and his awareness of the family unit as a bulwark against the encroaching

mechanization of modern life. Hence what the French Dickens scholar Louis Cazamian has so rightly called Dickens' philosophy of Christmas. (83). Christmas Dickens celebrates as a human, not supernatural, feast, the emphasis is on the glowing goose, the gravy, the plum-pudding, the feeling of family togetherness, not the simple Christian promise offered by the birth of the Messiah. (84).

It is the essence of Dickens' achievement that he should have combined in his fiction this common touch, with the ability to operate on a complex symbolic level, and handle themes of considerable depth and permanent validity in a truly popular form. So much has been made of the influence of the French symbolist poets on modern literature, that we are liable to forget the really common nature of symbolism. Writing of another great creative genius of the nineteenth century, Richard Wagner, the contemporary musicologist Robert Donington quite rightly stresses the every-day quality of truly profound and deeply informative symbolism, "the subject of these symbols is in no way remote or mysterious," he says, "The subject is everyday reality... There is no special secret about the symbols which are incorporated in a work of art. They are merely one variety of a method of communication with which we are all familiar. We are so familiar with it that we take it for granted. We use it all the time, but we are hardly aware we are using it... Poetry, so long as it remains poetry, never explains; it simply presents images... The images work because they are symbolic. They are not merely symbolic on a deliberate level; they are symbolic already of their own accord. True poetic creation is a primarily intuitive affair."

This may seem a naive comment, but although there may be some doubt about the actual instinctive nature of poetic creation, I believe the instinctive quality of our reaction to symbol is a fairly neglected aspect of literary aesthetics. Dickens was able to write fictional narrative prose with a complex symbolic element to which quite ordinary people could react deeply and instinctively. Like Wagner, Dickens too was able to grasp the potential power of using a small group of clearly defined but vital, almost mythical, characters for his narrative. (86). The parallel with Walt Disney is here I think a valuable one. (87). Because, like Disney, Dickens seems tuned to the archetypal fable, to grasp the simple hopes, aspirations, terrors, comicalities and catastrophes of human life, and to express them - albeit with imaginative complexity and subtle poetry - in the form of the fable, the simple, almost obvious, narrative of the fireside.

There is no legislation for criticism, all true criticism is empirical. One novel may start his work with the subjective view of infant bedwetting, another with an objective statement on marriage. Both may be avowed magnificent novels. Comparison is, naturally, the lifeblood of criticism, but the art of criticism lies in gauging the relevant comparisons. I feel that recent criticism of Dickens with its overt or implied reference to Tolstoy, D.H. Lawrence or E.M. Forster, is misleading and extravagant. "One begins to brood upon what Dostoievsky would have made of Agnes," writes John Jones in an essay on David Copperfield "and what Tolstoi - or even George Eliot - would have done with David's marriage to Dora Spenlow..."

It seems to be such an easy thing to talk Dickens away, to say he is no Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, E.M. Forster, Joseph Conrad; but one feels a just rejoinder would be that they, not one of them, is a Dickens. Dickens has something, a special something, that has made him a best seller, a famous novelist, a focal point of radical ambition, a classic and an object of continued critical examination and exegesis. What is this something? One can even talk away Dickens' works along the usual lines: from Monk Lewis he took the horror, from Goldsmith he borrowed the sentimental, from Carlyle the social theory, from Fielding and Smollett the penchant for sharp caricature and the rambling structure, from his age he took the violence, from the Arabian Nights he took the fay and the magical. The famous repeated verbal mannerisms, it is claimed, Dickens borrowed from the comedian Charles Mathews (1776-1835), whom Dickens admired considerably. (89). But even then one feels that there is still something one hasn't named and recognised. There is still some almost magical element which is so obviously there, and so obviously unique.

It is these qualities, which are so hard to name and to recognise, these qualities which give Dickens' art its unmistakable uniqueness even in the earlier works, which I have attempted to examine in this study.

CHAPTER ONE

CHARLES DICKENS - THE MYTHMAKER OF SOCIAL CHANGE

"I honestly think that the great pagan world of which Egypt and Greece were the last living terms, the great pagan world which preceded our own era once, had a vast and perhaps perfect science of its own, a science in terms of life...I believe that this great science previous to ours and quite different in nature and constitution from our science once was universal, established all over the then-existing globe... Just as mathematics and mechanics...are defined and expounded in the same way in the universities of China or Bolivia or London or Moscow today...in the great world previous to ours a great science and cosmology were taught esoterically in all countries of the globe... In the period which geologists call the Glacial Period, the waters of the earth must have been gathered up in a vast body on the higher places of our globe...the sea-beds of today must have been comparatively dry... In that world men lived and taught and knew, and were in one complete correspondence all over the earth. Men wandered back and forth from Atlantis to the Polynesian Continent...and knowledge, science was universal over the earth, cosmopolitan as it is today... And so, the intense potency of symbols is part at least memory. And so it is that all the great symbols and myths...are very much the same in every country and every people, the great myths all relate to one another..."

D.H. Lawrence: Foreword to Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious. (1923)

"Art is ruled uniquely by the imagination. Images are its only wealth. It does not clarify objects, it does not pronounce them real or imaginary, does not qualify them, does not define them; it feels and presents them - nothing more."

Benedetto Croce: Esthetic Chapter 1

The child is father of the Man:
And I would wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

Wordsworth: A Rainbow

(i)

What I am trying to do in this study of Barnaby Rudge, The Old Curiosity Shop and Dombey and Son is to show how wonderful, how really great, early Dickens is. The Dickens of before 1850, it seems to me, is far more "mythological", far more in touch with, or operative within, those reaches of the collective and individual subconscious which are among the qualities which make us fully human. Dickens' art, though no less marvellous after the turn of the century, does seem to me to become, in Professor Barbara Hardy's just phrase, more "documentary".

At the time of writing these novels in the 1840's Charles Dickens was still trying to assimilate, trying to come to terms with his own childhood and this it is which gives his use of the child figure such a special power and such a special poignance. Still so painfully aware of the child's vision of reality as he was, still with his sense of the child's view of justice and injustice, of innocence and search, he uses the child figure to explore the world of that decade.

It was G.K. Chesterton who suggested that Dickens was more of a mythologist than a novelist, and claimed that he was probably the last and the greatest of mythologists. It is this mythological, psychological side with which I am particularly concerned here. It is, I believe, no accident that Freud used mythological names when charting the unconscious. Freud did not claim to have discovered the unconscious - it had been known to poets for thousands of years he said - he created the scientific method whereby the subconscious can be studied. I am well aware of the discredit into which Freud has currently fallen (1)

but believe that if carefully used, the work of Freud, Jung and Adler can be a great help in studying literature. No discipline can provide a complete answer, a complete analysis; every different kind of attempt at evaluating and explaining a work of art creates its own kind of cul-de-sac. The human mind is rich, subtle and elusive: I do not claim that psychology provides a complete and definitive exegesis of the workings of the mind, but I have found the work of the great pioneer explorers of the psyche to provide a useful frame of reference in attempting to understand Dickens' achievement.

I became interested in Dickens' early fiction after being involved in teaching the Victorian period with several generations of students. The question which interested me particularly was, how did an imaginative novelist respond to rapid and far-reaching social change? Dickens' early work has been neglected in the great critical re-awakening which followed the publication of T.A. Jackson's Dickens: The Progress of a Radical (1937) and Edmund Wilson's Dickens: The Two Scrooges (1941) and which seemed to reach full tide in the centenary year, 1970. In that year the Leavises propounded that a survey which included the early novels was both critically unprofitable and merely academic (2). Steven Marcus alone has devoted his pains to the early years of Dickens' creative life (3). A significant part of the novelist's output has therefore been seriously neglected. My main concern in this study has been to examine Dickens' reaction to social change and the manner in which he expresses that reaction.

Dickens' use of the child innocent plays a central part in this undertaking. In his creative works Dickens seems to operate mainly in two areas of the imagination: his own personal unconscious - marked as he was by his own childhood experiences. Dickens was never really freed from his own childhood, he never succeeded in working it out in his writings. In much of his work he seems to be doing what Jung describes as achieving "a remembering that is also a re-experiencing" (4). This produces a long series of treatments of the child in his novels, *Oliver*, *Smyke*, *Barnaby*, *Nell*, the *Dombey*s and so on. But as well as using these resources of his own personal unconscious, Dickens also seems to operate on a much deeper level, and to draw on "the buried treasure which mankind ever and anon has drawn, and from which it has raised up its gods and demons, and all those potent and almighty thoughts without which man ceases to be man".(5) Dickens, then, seems to move in both what Jung has subsequently called, the personal and the collective unconscious.

It seems to me that the writings of Charles Dickens have some magic in them, a magic which is hard to specify, but this something makes him quite, quite different from other early Victorian novelists. When we say of something that it is "Dickensian" we usually mean that it is quaint, "old fashioned", hearty, innocent, warm and generous, grotesque or sentimental and so on: my concern in this study is to examine that strange potency of Dickens' work, especially in its early manifestation, in that odd and compelling sense of the "other" world present, all the time, in his vision of this world. Dickens saw more,

thought more, sensed more than the normal, even George Henry Lewes had to admit that (6). This almost insane, visionary quality, which Lewes likens to the imagination of William Blake, has the clarity, perception and immediacy of the child: he says that academic criticism of Dickens has been unable to get to grips with the simple, direct, appeal of his works: "...even on technical grounds their criticism has been so far defective that it failed to recognise the supreme powers which ensured his triumph in spite of all defects. For the reader of cultivated taste there is little in his works beyond the stirring of their emotions - but what a large exception! We do not turn over the pages in search of thought, delicate psychological observation, grace of style, charm of composition; but we enjoy them like children at a play, laughing and crying at the images which pass before us..." (7). These are not blemishes in Dickens' art, the minor things which flaw an otherwise acceptable novelist. They are basic in Dickens' unique qualities as a writer. Henry James lamented that Dickens brought everything down to the level of the apple woman at the street corner, but it is a triumph of Dickens' art that he could so speak to us all. This is partly the result, I believe, of his prescience, he sees more, and communicates more perceptively to us all, he seems somehow to inhabit our deeper imaginations, the chords he strikes in our minds are deeper than those of other writers. There is some evidence for his awareness of the "other" world, some of it very strange.

His view of the "other" world was not a simple one. He seems to have believed in its existence, but he did not believe that we were able to make direct contact with it at will, through

the "art" of mediums and clairvoyants. "My own mind is perfectly unprejudiced and impressible on the subject..." he wrote in a letter in September 1859 (8). "I do not in the least pretend that such things are not... I have not yet met with any Ghost Story that was proved to me... I have always had a strong interest in the subject, and never knowingly lose an opportunity of pursuing it... Don't suppose that I am so bold...as to settle what can and cannot be, after death..." (9). A few weeks later he wrote to William Howitt (10) that he would willingly visit any proposed "haunted house" and see for himself (11). But he was clear in his opinions of the practitioners of "Spiritualism" - "My opinion of the whole party, is, that it is a combination of addle-headed persons, Toadies and Humbugs." (12) He had "not the least belief in the awful unseen world being available for evening parties at so much per night..." (13). The frequent references in his work as well as the evidence of his library testify to his long lasting interest in dreams, trances, sleep-walking, magic, the supernatural (14). Another aspect of his "unworldly" or "otherworldly" qualities is the apparently hypnotic effects of his public readings (15). In a fascinating book, The Charles Dickens Show, Raymund Fitzsimons has put together the evidence in an attempt to re-create the effect of Dickens' readings. Two things stand out in Dickens' performances - his strange, uncannily compulsive power over the audience wherever he read (16) - they would laugh, cry, roll about in the aisles, hold their breath, scream with fright, literally at his bidding: and then there is his strange ability to assume character, to become in public view, in the space of a split second, another person - he was Bill Sikes, Justice Stareleigh, Paul Dombey, Scrooge, and the audience believed they saw

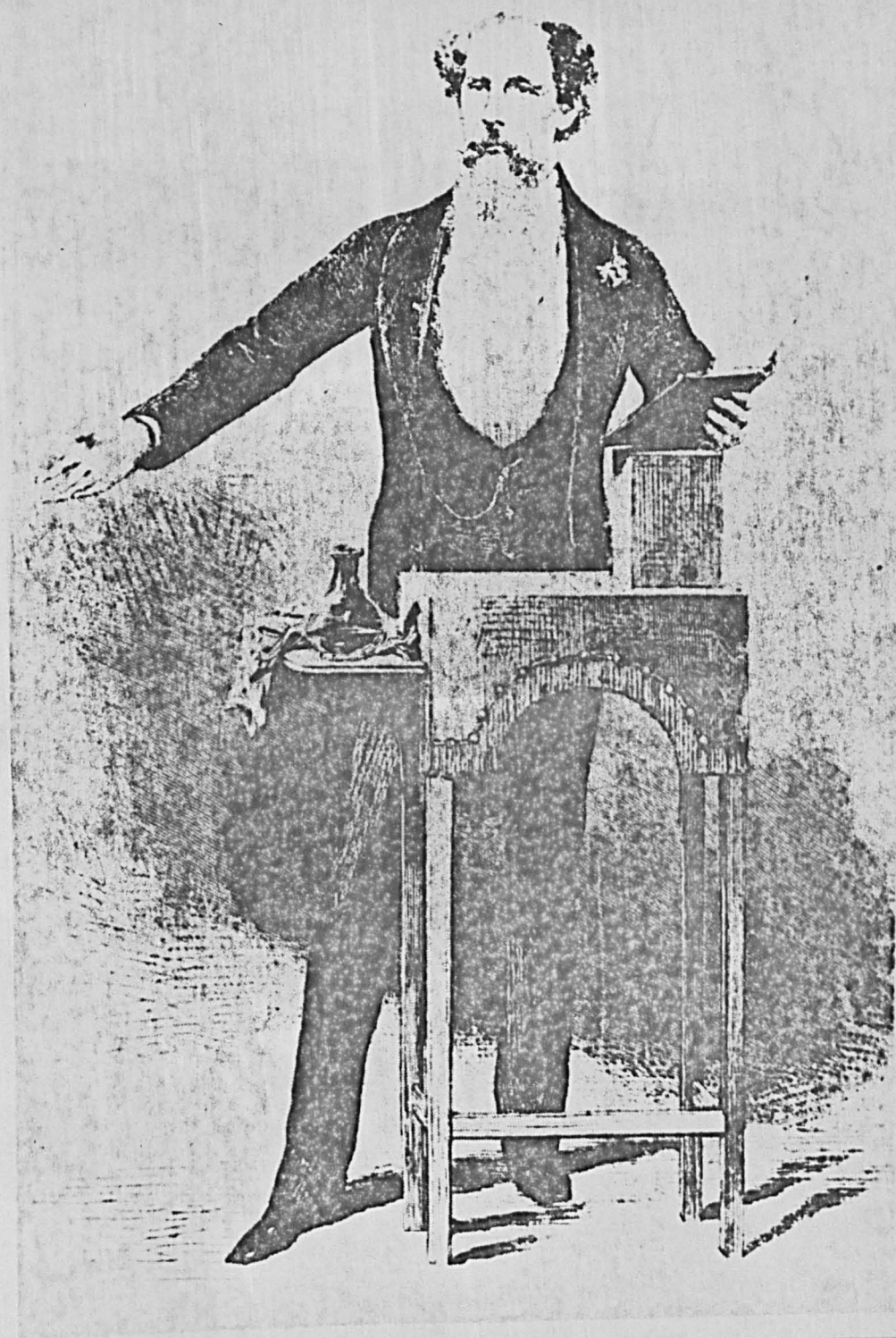
Charles Dickens giving a public reading
(Illustrated London News).

"They lost nothing, misinterpreted nothing, followed everything closely, laughed and cried...and animated me to that extent that I felt as if we were all bodily going up into the clouds together."

Charles Dickens in a letter, 13th January 1854. He is describing his reading of A Christmas Carol before an audience of 2,500 working people at Birmingham Town Hall, in December 1853.

the very character, not Dickens "pretending" to be Scrooge, but that Scrooge stood before them. (17) We have Dickens' own words for the strange, unearthly effect of his public reading: "I felt as if we were all bodily going up into the clouds together," he said, of a reading (18). Wilkie Collins said that his performance in The Frozen Deep at Manchester electrified an audience of some three thousand (19). Even such an anti-Dickensian as "Hugh Kingsmill" has to cede the master's skill as a performer (20). A certain Miss Cockran, who was determined not to be moved by Dickens' reading, found his performances absolutely irresistible, "He is a wonderful magician," she said (21).

Can we take Dickens' proved magic as a public performer of his own works as evidence of any special psychic qualities or not? Well, I suppose, this could be talked away simply as evidence of his skill in manipulating a public audience etc. etc. - theatrical trickery of one kind or another; but it is more difficult to minimise Dickens' proved second-sight (22). In 1857 he predicted the St. Leger winners. He was not a racing man, but taken to the races with friends bought the race card and, as he says, facetiously wrote down three names for the winners of the three chief races, "and if you can believe it without your hair standing on end," he said, "those three races were won, one after another, by those three horses!" (23). He told George Dolby that he had premonitions of his own life (24). The novelist also had premonitions of the death of his son Walter at the Officer's Hospital, Calcutta in 1863 (25). There is also the story of Dickens' dream of Miss Napier. In May 1863 Dickens dreamed that he saw a lady in a red shawl with her back



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to him. She turned round and he did not recognise her, but she said to him, "I am Miss Napier". The next day, after a reading, a lady was introduced to him. "Not Miss Napier?" Dickens asked jocularly: her name was Napier (26).

Lord Lytton gave Dickens the idea for a ghost story for All the Year Round which was published in the 125th issue. It was in fact a true story and the person to whom the incidents had actually happened had promised the story to another journal; he had no idea Lytton had given Dickens the story outline and when he saw the tale in All the Year Round quite naturally assumed there had been some treachery at the printer's. He wrote to Dickens and complained: "In particular," he said, "how else was it possible that the date, 13th September, could have been got at? For I never told the date, until I wrote it." The explanation is very strange: Dickens had looked through the version he had drafted out for inclusion in All the Year Round, and thought it would look more authentic if it had a date, and so he had added "September 13th" (27).

We are in contact with an extraordinary mind, then: I believe this partly accounts for the power and effect of Dickens' writing on us: it is as if Dickens is telling us things we already know, or half know: as if he is able to inhabit and move within our very subconscious and speak to us all on a level and in tones which we can immediately respond to. He believed that his stories and ideas came to him ready made, from some subconscious, outside power, that inspiration was mysterious but direct: he wrote to George Henry Lewes of a passage in Oliver Twist, "I thought that passage a good one when I wrote it...it

Charles Dickens' son, Walter Landor Dickens, who died at Calcutta in December 1863.

"...On the last night of the old year I was acting charades with all the children. I had made something to carry, as the Goddess of Discord; and it came into my head as it stood against the wall while I was dressing, that it was like the dismal things that are carried at Funerals. I took a pair of scissors and cut away a quantity of black calico that was upon it, to remove this likeness. But while I was using it, I noticed that its shadow on the wall still had that resemblance, though the thing itself had not. And when I went to bed, it was in my bedroom, and still looked so like, that I took it to pieces before I went to sleep. All this would have been exactly the same, if poor Walter had not died that night..." Charles Dickens in a letter to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 12th February 1864.



came to me like all my other ideas...ready-made to the point of the pen...and down it went..." (28) and similarly of his composing sections of Dombey and Son he said that it was simply given to him, he did not invent it, he saw it, and just had to write it down (29). He seems well aware of the richness of the unconscious and even the basis in dream and the collective subconscious for "all fable and allegory" - his words (30). There is a passage in Oliver Twist where he describes the drowsy state of half-sleep, half consciousness in which one perceives things deeply: "There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast closed, and your senses wrapt in perfect unconsciousness. At such times, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its bounding from earth, and spurning time and space, when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate." (31)

Dickens has such an universal appeal, and reaches us so deeply, also because of his ability to deal in terms of archetype, he deals in the common currency of human anxieties, phobias and hopes, that international currency of the human soul; in the words of Thomas Mann, "...when a writer has acquired the habit of regarding life as mythical and typical there comes a curious heightening of his artistic temper, a new refreshment to his perceiving and shaping powers, which otherwise occurs much later in life; for while in the life of the human race the mythical is an early and primitive stage, in the life of the

individual it is a late and mature one. What is gained is an insight into the higher truth depicted in the actual; a smiling knowledge of the eternal, the ever-being and authentic..." (32). As Dickens says of human dreams, far from being different and various, they show "a remarkable sameness...common to us all, from the Queen to the costermonger..." (33). He is thus able to draw on the permanent, unwritten, inherited unconscious mythology of the human imagination, (34) and therefore to respond fully to his work we have to be prepared to allow inference, suggestion, metaphor and symbolism to play upon the mind: this is not easy for us of the twentieth century who have so successfully alienated ourselves from the symbolic and poetic level of artistic creation. "The resistance of the conscious mind to the unconscious," Jung wrote, "and the deprecation of the latter were historical necessities in the development of the human psyche... But modern man's consciousness has strayed rather too far from the fact of the unconscious. We have even forgotten that the psyche is by no means of our design, but is for the most part autonomous and unconscious. Consequently the approach of the unconscious induces a panic of fear in civilised people...on account of the menacing analogy with insanity..." (35). I am aware of recent opposition to Jung's hypothesis of the collective unconscious (36) - but Jung's theories continue to impress me, a psychological equivalent to physical instinct would explain the deep effects of archetypal symbolism and help us chart an otherwise un-navigable area of human consciousness (37).

Dickens deals again and again in those themes of his childhood past which so affected him and yet also presents the texture

and quality of life in archetypal symbols and images to which we collectively respond. His suffering as a child made him portray the isolated, persecuted, and in some cases, the martyred child: but in a world where human beings were becoming increasingly anonymous, where human society was becoming increasingly disintegrated and where the family was becoming increasingly fragmented - Dickens created the symbol of the alienated child, a powerful image of man lost in his own society.

Any moment in history may arguably be termed "a period of transition" and the period concerned in this study, the very beginnings of the Victorian age, may no less justly be termed a "period of transition". Obviously, maybe too obviously, it is the opening phase of what is recognisably, the modern age - the age we live in. It can be argued that the Victorians were the earliest people to realise that they were living in an age of transition, living during the change from the past to the future. Sir Henry Holland, writing in the Edinburgh Quarterly in 1858, referred to the remarkable period "in which our lot is cast" and called it "an age of transition" (38). Prince Albert, Matthew Arnold, Disraeli, Carlyle, Bulwer Lytton, Frederic Harrison, William Morris, John Morley, Tennyson refer specifically to transition and transitional age. (39) J.S. Mill found transition to be the leading characteristic of the time; mankind had outgrown old institutions and old doctrines he believed, and had not yet fully acquired new ones - this had been noticed only recently by the discerning "a few years ago" (he is writing in the early 1830's) and that now "it forces itself upon the most observant". (40) They tended to see their age, the new age, the modern age - as the final break with the Middle Ages. (41)

The majority of Victorians who could recall an age before the railroad felt that they had lived in two separate worlds: "It was only yesterday" Thackeray wrote, "but what a gulf between now and then! Then was the old world. Stage-coaches...riding horses, pack-horses, highwaymen, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue... - all these belong to the old period... But your railroad starts the new era, and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one... We are of the age of steam." (42) The very title of Carlyle's Past and Present implied a comparison of the modern age and the Middle Ages. For Carlyle, writing in the 1840's, the past was very hard clearly to discern: "The Past cannot be seen: the Past, looked at through the medium of 'Philosophical History' in these times, cannot even be not seen: it is misseen; affirmed to have existed..." (43) and in a very beautiful passage in Sartor Resartus, Carlyle describes the Present as "an inconsiderable Film dividing the Past and the Future..." (44) Dr. Arnold, when seeing the first train pass through the Rugby countryside, murmured that feudality had gone forever. (45)

The really significant thing being realised by those living at the time is that the changes they observe going on around them are not minor, isolated peripheral changes, but that the whole fabric and structure of society is changing; the railway, the mechanical means of industrial production - these are only the outward and visible signs of truly radical change. Carlyle, again, is our best witness: "The evidence of miraculous social change," he says, "is to be found not so much in the Poet's or

Thomas Carlyle as a young man.

"The Present Time, youngest-born of Eternity, child and heir of all the Past Times with their good and evil, and parent of all the Future, is ever a 'New Era' to the thinking man..."
Latter-Day Pamphlets No.1.



Prophet's inspired Message, but in the symbolic machinery of the age: ...but cannot the dullest hear Steam Engines clanking around him? Has he not seen the Scottish Brassmill's IDEA (and this but a mechanical one) travelling on fire-wings round the Cape, and across two Oceans; and stronger than any Enchanter's Familiar, on all hands unweariedly fetching and carrying: at home, not only weaving cloth; but rapidly enough overturning the whole system of Society; and, for Feudalism and Preservation of the Game, preparing us, by indirect but sure methods, Industrialism and the Government of the Wisest? Truly a Thinking Man is the worst enemy the Prince of Darkness can have?..." (46) The dangers of this new departure, as Carlyle saw them, were that it was a journey over unmapped land, "...the new man is in a new time, under new conditions; his course can be the fac-simile of no prior one, but is by its nature original..." (47)

The period portrayed in these early novels of Dickens is the period of the beginnings of popular democracy, the industrial metamorphosis on a scale unequalled in history, the foundation and preliminary exploitation of a system of transport and communication we may today take for granted, the end of aristocratic control and the emergence of the ethos of self-help and its consequent effects on the social hierarchy (48).

In the year of Dickens' birth the news of Napoleon's humiliation at Moscow took many hours of travel over land and sea to reach the capital cities of Europe. Before he was forty, in 1851, the news of Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat in December, was sent by electric telegraph within an hour of its happening:

an immediacy which must have seemed astounding at the time:
"Paris in a state of siege. Dissolution of the Assembly.
By electric telegraph, Paris Tuesday morning, December 2nd...
The President of the Republic accomplished a coup d'etat this
morning. The principal streets in Paris were occupied at an
early hour by strong bodies of infantry, cavalry and artillery..."
(49).

Frances Ann Kemble (1809-1893) Fanny Kemble the actress,
daughter of Charles Kemble, in describing an early railway
journey on August 26th 1830, writes in terms of equestrian
transport: "We were introduced to the little engine which was
to drag us along the rails, she (for they make these curious
little fire-horses all mares) consisted of a boiler, a stove,
a small platform, a bench and behind the bench a barrel contain-
ing enough water to prevent her being thirsty for fifteen miles.
... She goes upon two wheels, which are her feet, and are
moved by bright steel legs called pistons... The reins, bit
and bridle of this wonderful beast is a small steel handle...
The coals, which are its oats, were under the bench..." (50)
The last mail coach to run from Bath to London ran in 1841, and
before Dickens' thirtieth birthday "Mr. Weller senior could
think about hanging up his whip for good and all" (51). By
1848 over 1,800 miles of railways - a third of the whole mileage
in use - were already equipped with telegraph wires. In 1846
the Electric Telegraph Company was founded, and by 1854 had
seventeen offices in London. The arrangements for the candida-
ture of the Prince Consort as Chancellor of the University of
Cambridge in 1847 were in part conducted by telegram. By the

following year Punch was predicting the dire effect of the telegraph on "the operations of everyday life, as it has been proposed to carry on ordinary conversation by means of the Electric Telegraph... We should not be surprised to hear of Her Majesty's having resolve to deliver her Speech by Electric Telegraph...and though the dial plate of the machine would not be such a pleasing object as that disc of sunshine, the countenance of Royalty, we think there would be something gained in sparing the Queen the bore of a very tiresome ceremony, in which she is annually obliged to participate." (52)

Contemporary with the development of rail transport was the ascendancy of steam over sail. In 1847, for example, of a total tonnage of 3,000,000 in the merchant fleet, already 116,000 tons were steamships. In 1842 Dickens sailed for the United States in the Steamship Brittania. The ocean-going vessels of the mid-century were increasingly steam propelled and made of iron, and later of steel. By 1848 Britain produced half the pig-iron of the world, and in the next three decades output was to be trebled.

In Dickens' fortieth year was staged in London The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations. In the year of his death in 1870 the volume of the external trade of Great Britain was more than that of France, Germany and Italy put together and was between three and four times that of the United States of America. If Mr. Pickwick's world was "the world of the fast stage coach and the First Reform Bill" (53) the world of Mr. Dombey was the world of iron and steel,

tremendous trade advancement, public agitation for the expansion of the franchise, and far-reaching re-adjustment and upheaval (54). One of the most notable modern historians of the 19th Century comments "(Britain's) new wealth and world supremacy rested on foundations of harsh and sweated labour, appalling slum conditions...and immense social misery. Progress and the enlightenment of which Cobden was so proud coincided with conditions of cut-throat competition and inhuman exploitation... The generation between 1815 and 1850 suffered from the combined aftermath of two great social and political revolutions, the American and the French; of two great social and economic upheavals, the agrarian and industrial revolutions; of two great foreign wars, the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars... The American and French Revolutions set in motion a whole new tide of new forces and ideas... The agrarian and industrial revolutions... transformed the face and life of the nation and brought immense prosperity and misery combined...the period...is one of strenuous activity and dynamic change, of ferment of ideas and recurrent social unrest, of great inventiveness and expansion..." (55).

(ii)

More and more we are coming to realise how crucial, to literature and social theory, as well as to industry, is the period of the decade following 1840. The English literature of the period is the first literature in the world to have to come to terms with those changes (which we in the wisdom of our hindsight know to be far-reaching but which to contemporaries must have seemed a meaningless if progressing flux) that have created the "modern" world. It has been claimed that it was these very conditions which created, which made necessary, the novel as a

literary form (56). My concern in this study is to consider how Dickens reacted to these vast changes, and how he expressed his reaction in prose fiction. (57)

In many ways, Dickens was the earliest writer to show a reaction to these sociological events and changes. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than reference, however brief, to the immediate contemporary works of The Old Curiosity Shop, The Christmas Books and Dombey and Son. The tale of Nell and her grandfather reached 100,000 an issue (58) but what were the other best sellers of the time and did they show any awareness of social change? (59)

Frances Trollope (1780-1863) the mother of Anthony, was well established with the public by the 1840's. She was already quite celebrated for her vituperative description of the Americans (Domestic Manners of the Americans 1832) but had turned to novels by the end of the 1830's. The Vicar of Wrexhill appeared in 1837, The Widow Barnaby the following year and The Widow Married in 1840. The Lottery of Marriage was published in 1846. In some respects she specialised in an area of social behaviour also developed by Dickens, money and marriage themes. The Widow Barnaby for example has for its leading character a shrewd and calculating widow who schemes to make a rich marriage. She does not succeed and is imprisoned for debt. Here she meets a fellow prisoner, Patrick O'Donagough, who develops into a gambler and drunkard.

In the 1830's Mary Russell Mitford (1789-1855) had come

into vogue with her poetic tragedies, of which the most celebrated was probably Rienzi (1828). She is chiefly remembered for her descriptions of English rural life, Our Village which was serialised in The Lady's Magazine in the years 1824-1832. A writer popular throughout this period was G.P.R. James (1799-1860). He came to success on the crest of the wave of historical fiction started by Scott. His output was considerable, in The Parlour and Railway Library of 1847-1849 he has forty-seven titles. The most celebrated were Richelieu (1829), Philip Augustus (1831), Darnley (1833) as well as popular historical biographies such as The Life of the Black Prince (1836). James was widely read throughout the 1840's (60). Like Harrison Ainsworth (1805-1882) he could be blamed for adding the dimension of sensationalism to the historical romance as left by Scott. Ainsworth was immensely popular at this time, Rookwood (1834), Jack Sheppard (1839), The Tower of London (1840), Old St. Paul's (1841), Windsor Castle (1843) - his energy miraculously kept pace with the public's insatiable appetite. When Windsor Castle was published in a cheap collected edition in 1849 it sold 30,000 copies in a short time. (61)

Edward Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873) tried his hand deftly at one kind of popular novel after another, Pelham (the novel of high social life) came out in 1828, The Last Days of Pompeii (the first of a rich series of historical novels) in 1834, this was immediately followed by Rienzi in 1835, The Last of the Barons in 1843 and Harold in 1848. In 1853 when Pelham was issued in Routledge's Railway Edition it sold 46,000 in five years. (62) Lytton was also successful as a sentimental, not

to say melodramatic, playwright. Money, which was produced in 1840, and Richelieu of 1839 were both successful stage vehicles (63).

A writer in vogue at this time, although now largely forgotten, was Philip Meadows Taylor (1808-1876) who produced some interesting works on India, both past and present. The Confessions of a Thug (1839) and Tippo Sultaun (1840) made him famous (64).

For their seemingly endless output of hearty, rollicking adventures, comic and simply high spirited, Robert Smith Surtees (1803-1864) and Charles James Lever (1806-1872) were avidly accepted by a greedy public. Now faintly sickening, Jorrocks Jaunts and Jollities (1838) Handley Cross (1843) Hillington Hall (1845) Hawbuck Grange (1847) of Surtees, and Harry Lorrequer (1837) Charles O'Malley (1840) Jack Hinton the Guardsman (1843) Tom Burke of Ours and Arthur O'Leary (both published in 1844) The O'Donoghue (1845) and The Knight of Gwynne (1847) of Lever - these works are the exact contemporary of Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop, Barnaby Rudge, Christmas Books and Dombey.

Rather more serious, though failing to assimilate economic and social theories and produce them in the thematic structure of works of fiction, are the stories of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876). Although they do not sound like fictional tales, Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated (1833) Illustrations of Taxation (1834) are stories to propagate the ideas of James Mill and Ricardo. The novels Deersbrook and The Hour and the Man

appeared in 1839 and 1841, the latter, an historical romance dealing with the life story of Toussaint l'Ouverture, the negro liberator of Haiti, who defied French, British and Spanish efforts to suppress his revolutionary movement and was eventually imprisoned by Napoleon. She published The Playfellow (stories for children) in 1841 and Forest and Game Law Tales in 1845. In 1849 appeared her History of the Thirty Years Peace 1815-1845. This is a neglected piece of early Victorian historical writing. Although biassed on the Whig side it was a vivid and courageous attempt to view recent events and understand their sequence. Miss Martineau's range of interests in social questions is demonstrated even by so cursory a discussion as this one. She is one of the few writers of this time who regards social questions thoughtfully and attempts to view both the causes of distress and the possibility of making them better. But it is debatable whether she succeeds in making fiction an adequate vehicle for social comment. (65)

The familiar Victorian novelists who seem, at times, to analyse and criticise Victorian society and its values - Charles Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot - appear later on the scene.

Kingsley (1819-1875) in some respects seems to strike the same note as Dickens: he shows a keen sense of sympathy for the poor, in some respects seems to yearn for the past ("I would, if I could, restore the feudal system, the highest form of civilisation - in ideal, not in practice - which Europe has ever seen..." he once wrote to a friend) and also has signs of

primitive socialism, "we have used the Bible as if it was a mere special constable's handbook...for keeping beasts of burden patient while they were being overloaded...Instead of being a book to keep the poor in order, it is a book written to keep the rich in order" he says in Politics for the People. But his famous treatments of the rural and town working class in Yeast and Alton Locke do not appear until several years after Dickens' early novels. Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton does not appear until 1848. The one novelist who does seem aware of the real social and political issues is Disraeli. The writings of Carlyle do, of course, span this very decade.

Some of these writers - the historical romancers, the sporting storytellers, the sentimental and social novelists, do not seem in any way aware of the changing features of the society they live in. But what is seen by those who are aware?

Thackeray's comments at this time are spasmodic, not to say hit-and-miss, as his satiric comments appear at this early date in the occasional articles he writes for Punch, Fraser's Magazine, The New Monthly Magazine. These are squibs which lack the sustained analysis of a committed social critic. The Yellowplush Correspondence (66) Mr. Yellowplush Ajew (67) The Diary of Mr. C. James de la Pluche (68) - all these contain delightful touches of satire, but the total effect is fragmentary and superficial. Thackeray does not really get to grips with fundamental issues of social behaviour and motivation until the end of the decade, with Vanity Fair (1847-1848), Pendennis (1848-1850) and The Newcomes (1853-1855). He is here, at his

earlier works, very much the novelist of manners - externals, appearances. But of those who look into the depths of cause, effect and attempt to foresee cure, it must be said that their vision seems strange and eccentric nowadays.

The almost snappy-catch-answers of the political economists, Mill and Bentham are rejected, so is representative government, so are mass-movements of the people themselves, in favour of revived aristocracy: there is a tendency to look back into the past rather than at the present or the future (Mrs. Gaskell for example has more allegiance with the old South than the modern North) and there seems to be a feeling that with a bit of patching here and there, work with scissors and paste, the whole system may be kept going for a few more hundred years. These do not seem to me to be the novels of writers who are very conscious of change, or who would welcome change if they even knew about it. I think it is a trifle severe to argue that this accounts for the vogue of the historical novel, that people would rather read and write about the past than modern times, as after all the historical novel was in vogue by the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But there does seem a kind of professional nostalgia affecting these writers.

The colourful historic past was an essential backcloth to the romantic imagination. The magnificent series of historical novels of Sir Walter Scott commencing with Waverley in 1814 is probably the best example in our language (69) but romantic opera which aspired to be amongst the high-watermark of the nineteenth century creative imagination, also furnishes us with many examples of the period's fascination with the past. (70)

It is hard not to notice the explicit faith in the old ways, represented by the aristocracy, in Kingsley's work, for example. "Twelve years of the New Poor Law have taught labouring men greater self-help and independence; I hope those virtues may not be destroyed in them once more, by the boundless and indiscriminate almsgiving which has become the fashion of the day..." he writes in a new Preface to Yeast in 1859 (71) and it is the big landowners who can be better relied upon to do their duty to society than statutes, M.P.'s, Acts and Government Reports: " ...meanwhile cottage improvements, and sanitary reform, throughout the country districts are going on at a fearfully slow rate. Here and there high hearted landlords, like the Duke of Bedford, are doing their duty like men..." (72).

There was also the faith in a new generation of the aristocracy. We note that Coningsby is sub-titled "the new generation" and recall Kingsley's words: " ...If it should be so... there is little fear but that the labouring men will find their aristocracy able to lead men in the battle field, and to develop the agricultural land at home, even better than did their grandfathers..." (73). When he goes on to say that he looks forward with hope and confidence to the days when these men shall settle down in life, and become, as holders of the land, the leaders of agricultural progress, and the guides and guardians of the labouring man (74) one finds oneself rising imperceptively on the warm air of Anglican poetry into the twilight realm where we shall all bless the squire and his relations and be glad to be kept in our proper stations. Strange, but he seemed radical enough to his contemporaries. Kingsley wrote to a brother

clergyman: "I do not think the cry 'Get on' to be anything but a devil's cry. The moral of my book is that the working man who tries to get on, to desert his class and rise above it, enters into a lie, and leaves God's path for his own - with consequences..." (75). Kingsley was well aware of the pitiable plight of the working classes, and in many of his writings we have evidence of the great respect he had for the patient and long suffering way with which they bore their grievances (76). He was aware too of the need for education before the giving of political responsibility, but he seems prepared to wait for education to come, to be given or granted, from on high: 'My belief remains unchanged that true Christianity, and true monarchy also, are not only compatible with, but require as their necessary complement, true freedom for every man of every class; and that the Charter, now defunct, was just as wise and as righteous a 'Reform Bill' as any which England had yet had... But I frankly say that my experience of the last five years gives me little hope of any great development of the true democratic principle in Britain, because it gives me little sign that the many are fit for it." (77) He goes on to say that the real meaning of democracy is not just government by numbers of isolated individuals, but a "Demos" of men accustomed to live in "Demoi" - corporate bodies and "accustomed...to the self-control, obedience to law, and that a 'democracy' of mere numbers is no democracy, but a mere brute 'arithmocracy' which would degenerate into 'government by the mob', in which the numbers have no real share: an oligarchy of the fiercest, the noisiest, the rashest, and the most shameless, which is surely swallowed up either by despotism, as in France, or as in Athens, by utter

national ruin... Let the workmen of Britain train themselves in the corporate spirit, and in the obedience and self-control which it brings..." (78). He concludes by thanking God that he has nothing to do with the government of England and saying that it was the job of everyone not to worry about getting their hands on power, but to do the tasks which lay nearest to them, educate their children, and thank God for all. (79) The message is clear enough, and it is hardly a radical one; there are those who are fit to govern, and those who should be prepared to be governed. The people are not ready for political involvement, but should get on with the work God sent them, ask no questions, pray and hope for the best. Let the existing order continue to exist and be grateful you are not burdened by decisions of state, etc. etc. The fear of the mob is very marked. It is curious to compare this turgid toryism with the true sense of burning social injustice which animates his picture of the dreadful sweater's den in the body of the same novel. (80)

The same paradox we find in the novels of Disraeli (81). Disraeli's early novels do not really suggest that he was later, in the 1840's, to produce "political" or "social" novels; Vivian Grey, which set society by the ears when it appeared in 1826 (82) would not have given Disraeli the almost unique position he has in English literature if he had died soon after its appearance. Although politics are the hero's ruling passion, there is little of the perception and intelligence we associate with the author of Sybil, Coningsby or Tancred. The Young Duke of 1831, Contarini Fleming (1832), Alroy (1833), Henrietta Temple (1837) - these novels would have given Disraeli an

The Sweat Shop

Punch Volume VIII (1845) page 3.

O! Men, with Sisters dear!
O! Men! with Mothers and Wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures lives!
Stitch - stitch - stitch,
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
Sewing at once with a double thread,
A shroud as well as a shirt.

But why do I talk of Death?
That Phantom of grisly bone,
I hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like my own. -
It seems so like my own,
Because of the fasts I keep,
Oh! God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!

Hood: The Song of the Shirt, first published in Punch (1843).



Bubbles of the Year. Cheap Clothing.

honourable place with Bulwer Lytton, Reade, Collins as a fine but essentially minor Victorian talent. The texture of the writing is evidence of their imaginative depth, I think: Disraeli is here essentially the novelist of manners, externals; and he is content to use the stylised mode of the novel of high society and the fashionable play. "I have no recollection of anything that occurred before I saw you beneath the cedar...that is the date of my existence. I saw you, and I loved..." reveals the hero of Henrietta Temple, in a passage which at times reaches the heights of Women's Own - "they went forth into the garden. Nature, with the splendid sky and the sweet breeze, seemed to smile on their passion..." (83)

Something happened to Disraeli which matured his talent. The theme of the Appollonian Youth is carried over into the novels following Venetia (84) but whether as a result of Disraeli's determination to make politics a serious career, or simply the result of his maturing, the novelist seems to slough off an outworn creative talent and assume a new one (85). The theme of the brilliant youth seems to combine the early and mature novels, but Disraeli's heroes now seem active in the political more than the simply social life. "I wish to act what I write," he wrote, "my works are the embodiment of my feelings..." (86) But in the novels written after Venetia he portrays more than feelings, we also find the ideology of a quick and original mind. (87)

His trilogy Coningsby (1844), Sybil (1845) and Tancred (1847) does really represent an attempt to discuss political

and social themes in the form of narrative prose fiction. (88) Disraeli's prescription for the current social and political malady was an aristocratic radicalism, and in the novels he becomes what Paul Bloomfield has happily described as "the most outstanding apologist of the principle of Noblesse Oblige" (89). As far as he could see, the British ruling classes could be relied upon to produce men in every generation who were able and willing to rule, and to rule like gentlemen. (90)

Coningsby is an unusual novel for the time as it views contemporary events and introduces contemporary characters. The ambitious young politician, excluded by the jealousy of Lord Stanley from cabinet office (91) Disraeli sat down to prescribe political panaceas while prevented from administering the medicine in person. Disraeli sees England suffering from a drifting state of political flux: "the Tamworth Manifesto...was an attempt to construct a party without principles...and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity. At an epoch of political perplexity and social alarm, the confederation was convenient... But when the perturbation was a little subsided, and men began to enquire why they were banded together, the difficulty of defining their purpose proved that the league... was not a party..." (92).

Here clearly is the voice of Young England - there is political confusion in the land, parties and factions lead to disunity and this at a time of national social, economic and political crisis; we shall never pull ourselves together except under the guidance of a new generation of well educated young gentlemen. The great Whig Reform Ministry had disintegrated, and the Whigs

seemed to be failing; the Tory party was split on the Corn Law issue, the political platform of the nation seemed to be on the point of its extinction by mass-movements: party politics were superceded by the public manifestation of national issues - in Chartism, agitation in Ireland which denounced the Act of Union, the Anti-Corn Law League and the Protectionists. In Parliament itself there were at least four main groups who seem to form separate entities: those who opposed Parliamentary Reform (93), this is the Old Tory group; there were the New Tory group, those who had accepted the Parliamentary Reform Bill of 1832, but not the doctrine of further and continuing "liberal" reforms. Peel spoke for them when he said in the Tamworth Manifesto, "I consider the Reform Bill a final and irrevocable settlement of the Great Constitutional Question...(the spirit of the Reform Bill) implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper...the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances..." (94). There were the Old Whigs, whose views more or less coincided with this, and lastly the New Whigs, who really emerge as the Liberals. They saw the Great Reform Bill not as the end, but the beginning of reform, the thin end of the wedge, the first stirrings of an eventual flood of reforms.

The Young England movement was a brand-new political force, and it came about because the group who created it believed that strong government was needed and they could not see its being provided by any of these four existing political groups within the House of Commons (95). Disraeli found that he was not listened to in the Tory party, he was laughed at or, frankly,

distrusted. On December 7th 1838, he made his first speech in the Commons, ending with his famous remark "I sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me." Apparently he could not wait for that time to come, and his political novels represent his attempt to make himself heard. Disraeli perceived that Peel's Toryism was of a cautious and compromising kind, and seemed all set to secure the support of the wealthy manufacturing classes of the new industrial age. His reaction to this was a romantic new Toryism, in some ways backward-looking, but more aristocratic and - paradoxically - more popular. The Young England movement had four main principles; the allegiance to the Crown, the responsibility of the landed gentry, the importance of the Church and the need to save the working classes from the exploitation of an un-checked factory system. The Whigs had failed because they had given in on the reform issue, they had betrayed the aristocracy; the New Tories could not be trusted as they seemed liable to ally with the New Whigs, at all costs the Whig oligarchy must be broken, that is why they saw triennial parliaments as a necessity so that aristocratic democracy could replace the time-honoured system of rule by the "nominees of a sectarian oligarchy". Above, it seems that Young England addressed itself to the youth of England. At a speech in Manchester in 1844 he said "The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity...the youth I address have duties peculiar to the position which they occupy. They are the rising generation of a society unprecedented...that is at once powerful and new. In other parts of the country the remains of an ancient civilisation are prepared to guide...the rising mind...I tell them to aspire." (96)

It is perhaps too easy, too simple, to relate the Young England movement so closely with the cult of the past (97) to see it as some sort of political equivalent of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; we should also note its sure commitment to the present: "The Age of Ruins is past," Sidonia tells Coningsby when they first meet, "Have you seen Manchester?" (98) I think we should take Manchester there as the symbol of the great industrial city, the merchants' mecca. If trade and commerce were to be a part of Young England's policy, then we may be sure these money-making activities would be guided and controlled by the legislation of a benevolent and efficient young aristocratic democracy. Coningsby cautions Sidonia by saying that the cult of individual leadership is contrary to the spirit of the age. The answer he gets is, I think, the true voice of Disraeli. "The age does not believe in great men, because it does not possess any... The Spirit of the Age is the very thing that a great man changes... When were they wanted more?... From the throne to the hovel all call for a guide. You give monarchs constitutions to teach them sovereignty, and nations Sunday schools to inspire them with faith." (99) Coningsby answers by asking what is an individual against a vast public opinion? "Divine," comes the answer, "God made man in His own image; but the public is made by Newspapers, Members of Parliament, Excise Officers, Poor Law Guardians. Would Philip have succeeded if Epaminondas had not been slain? And if Philip had not succeeded? Would Prussia have existed had Frederick not been born?... Almost everything that is great has been done by youth." (100) Towards the end of the book young Coningsby and his colleagues feel they have found

their feet, and found also that "the Whigs are worn out...Conservatism is a sham, and Radicalism is pollution." And when they get into the House they resolve to speak their minds "Without reference to any party whatever" and they hope they may all come in at the same time and "make a party of (their) own..." (101) The really striking difference between Disraeli and Dickens - and this, I think, is quite an understandable one considering the one an aspiring politician and the other a disillusioned parliamentary reporter - is that Disraeli places his hopes on parliamentary solutions: he criticises the state into which parliamentary democracy has got itself (102). "A crown robbed of its prerogatives; a Church controlled by a commission; and an Aristocracy that does not lead." (103) At the end of this section once again we find the fusion of the past and the present hammered home by the heroic words of Coningsby: "Where is the spirit that raised these walls?... Is it extinct? Is then this civilisation, so much vaunted, inseparable from moderate feelings and little thoughts? If so, give me back barbarism! But I cannot believe it. Man that is made in the image of the Creator, is made for God-like deeds. Come what come may, I will cling to the heroic principle..." (104)

The political parts of Coningsby show a keen and shrewd mind, hampered only by a possible glibness: where I find that Disraeli fails to inspire confidence is in the parts which deal with industry and the industrial life of the period. And this despite his protestations of direct, personal observation in the Advertisement dated May Day 1845: "The general reader...might suspect that the Writer has been tempted to some exaggeration in

the scenes he has drawn... He thinks it therefore due to himself to state that the descriptions, generally, are written from his own observation..." Some historians even assert that Disraeli actually exploited the romance of proletarian discontent and degradation (105). Coningsby goes to visit the factory run by the family of his Eton friend Oswald Millbank. I do not think it is possible to read the opening sections of Book Four and not notice the heady optimism with which Disraeli writes of the great new age of machinery. "He had travelled all day through the great district of labour, his mind excited by strange sights... He had passed over the plains where iron and coal superceded turf and corn, dingy as the entrance to Hades, and flaming with furnaces; and now he was among illuminated factories, with more windows than Italian palaces, and smoking chimneys taller than Egyptian obelisks... Even his bedroom was lit by gas. Wonderful city!... He opened the window. The summer air was sweet, even in this land of smoke and toil..."(106) Here we notice the emphasis on windows, light, sweet air: the excitement and sense of progressions: the use of the wonders of the past (Italian palaces, obelisks of ancient Egypt) to clothe modern industrialism with the respectability of the highest aesthetic achievements of man: and above all - and maybe this is really the key to Disraeli's view - the wonder of it all. I do not exaggerate, for when Coningsby goes on to walk around the factories, and sees all the toiling thousands, it is described once again in terms of fairy-land and fable: "He entered chambers vaster than are told of in Arabian fable, and peopled with habitants more wondrous than Afrite or Peri... A machine is a slave that neither brings nor bears degradation...it is not only

a slave, but a supernatural slave. And why should one say that the machine does not live? It breathes, for its breath forms the atmosphere of some towns. And has it not a voice? Does not the spindle sing like merry girl at her work, and the steam-engine roar in jolly chorus, like a strong artisan handling his lusty tools, and gaining a fair day's wages for a fair day's toil?" (107) This is no Coketown (108) nor does it resemble the midlands through which Nell and her grandfather make their anabasis. This complacent view is an essential part of Disraeli's world-picture: a democratic aristocratic state presupposes a happy, toiling proletariat (109), the whole society of this vision must blend harmoniously together; hence the emphasis he places on the sense of community in the political philosophy of this novel (110). Sidonia tells Coningsby that he looks for hope in something more powerful than laws and institutions "and without which the best laws and the most skilful institutions may be a dead letter... It is not in the increased feebleness of its institutions that I see the peril of England; it is in the decline of its character as a community...it is an age of social disorganisation... England should think more of the community and less of the government." (111) Sidonia traces the decline of public virtue "In the fact that the various classes of this society are arrayed against each other." So it seems we are back with the squire and his relations. These arguments are pushed further in Sybil, or The Two Nations which followed in 1845. For all the preparation and training Disraeli apparently went through before composing Sybil, it still lacks the quality of life - it has a quality which Arnold Kettle so justly labels "operatic" - "The total effect is...

extremely odd. One recalls the resources of the modern cinema; the whole paraphernalia of glorious technicolour, cheap heart-throb religiosity, the final 'Ave Maria' of Walt Disney's Fantasia. Or one thinks perhaps of the sort of effect Puccini is after - and indeed gets - in Tosca, with its mixture of 'roman policier', cathedral background, political melodrama and crude sex clichés." (112)

Although Disraeli went to the midlands and north of England, and read the government blue books to get his facts right, however well-intentioned he is in Sybil, his fable just doesn't live. It is "true" but not "real" (113). However absurd The Old Curiosity Shop is, Dickens has grasped a fundamental principle of the writer's craft, that truth, validity of vision, is not really linked in direct ratio to external vraisemblance, but to deeper sources of response, that sometimes the poet may present veracious experience in the exaggerated form of myth, grotesque and fable: in the words of the greatest master of the 19th Century mythic art, Richard Whilhelm Wagner (1813-1883) "The incomparable thing about the mythos is that it is true for all time, and its content, how close so ever its compression, is inexhaustible throughout the ages..." (114) Disraeli's figures mouth their socio-political doctrine with the accuracy and timing of ventriloquists' dummies and with about as much credibility. The opening is promising enough, the "two" nations are presented in powerful contrast: the rich nation by the Jockey Club in London where the well-to-do place their bets on the Derby (of June 1837) and this is countered by the poverty of the town of Marney, which attracts the dispossessed from the

country for "the proprietors of the neighbourhood having for the last half-century acted on the system of destroying the cottages on their estates, in order to become exempted from the maintenance of the population, the expelled people had flocked to Marney, where, during the war, a manufacturer had afforded them some relief..." (115). But it is not long before we find the obliging organist grinding out one of his favourite (and indeed one of his few) melodies: "The people are not strong; the people never can be strong. Their attempts at self-vindication will end only in suffering and confusion...you deem you are in darkness, and I see a dawn. The new generation of the aristocracy of England are not tyrants, not oppressors... Their intelligence, better than that, their hearts, are open to the responsibility of their position... Enough that their sympathies are awakened; time and thought will bring the rest. They are the natural leaders of the people... Believe me, they are the only ones..." (116) says Egremont, but it is only old Dizzy in another of his transparent masks.

The point about "natural" leaders is well demonstrated by the fact that the prima donna of this creaking performance, the seemingly proletarian Sybil herself, turns out to be well born and the daughter of the rightful Earl of Marney. Sybil is the daughter of Gerard, a Chartist leader, and she is loved by Charles Egremont. Charles is the younger brother of the current Lord Marney. Marney is shown by Disraeli as one of the worst - and meanest - of landlords. The unlikely denouement reveals that Sybil is really the descendant of the last Abbot of Marney whose family lost their wealth and holdings to those

who helped Henry VIII to plunder the ancient church. So there you have it. It is wonderful how nature so guides the noble that they recognise their own kind when they meet. "Sybil - or from overalls to ermine". Nor is the rest of this slack-water melodrama very convincing. Its much-vaunted portraits of industrial life touch as shallowly on the matter as in Coningsby. Just how much good did Disraeli think he was doing, for all parties concerned, by his portrait of trade unions in Sybil with the six men of Dorset's melancholy story barely a decade old? "Brethren", said a voice that seemed a presiding one, "before we proceed to the receipt of the revenue from the different districts of this lodge, there is - I am informed - a stranger present, who prays to be admitted into our fraternity. Are all robed in the mystic robe? Are all masked in the secret mask?..." What impression of unions would this give an unknowing reader? They would seem subversive covens. The ceremony becomes progressively sinister: "...after a movement which intimated that all present were kneeling, the presiding voice offered up an extemporary prayer of great power, and even eloquence. This was succeeded by the Hymn of Labour and at its conclusion the arms of the neophyte were unpinioned, and then his eyes were unbandaged..." The description goes on to enumerate the darkness, the black cloth hangings, seven persons in masks and robes, the president on a lofty seat, the skeleton on a pedestal (117). I do not find the book very radical, even from the standpoint of the mid eighteen forties. He seems to show little understanding of working people and their motives, working conditions are described, it is true, but they appear palpably "got up" for the occasion: I am conscious that Disraeli

must have done his homework, but whether he has seen, or understood, what he describes, I find room to doubt. The message of Sybil or The Two Nations seems to be that a good nature is synonymous with good breeding - which must out in the end. What of the celebrated perception which enabled Disraeli to see that Queen Victoria really ruled two nations "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy: who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws...THE RICH AND THE POOR. (118) This overt egalitarianism is all very well: it prompts a kind of cheer, a round of applause, when you read it. But it is not followed through in the novel - you cannot be "radical" one minute, and then make all these tribal claims about breeding and hereditary the next.

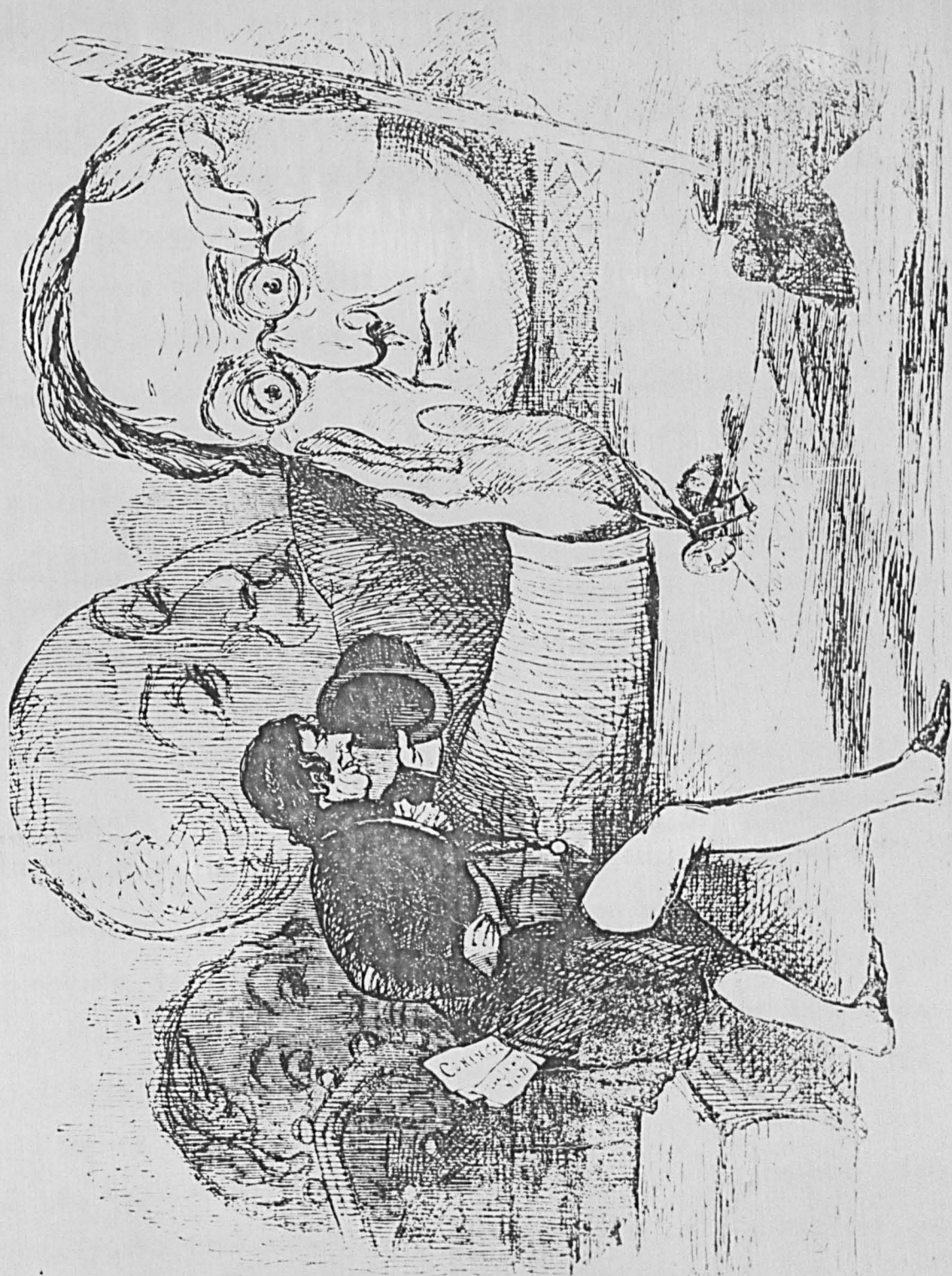
Great claims are made for Disraeli's panoramic view of English society, that he shows us all layers of society from the aristocratic, through the middle classes of varying degrees, the labourers in the country, the workers in towns - but these sections do not all have the same vividness or credibility as one another. Disraeli is on the side of nobles. An almost exact contemporary of his seems to have the last word on Young England: "...half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through its total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history. The

Young Gulliver and the Brobdingnag Minister.

"They all sat down in a circle about me, the better to observe my motions. I pulled off my hat and made a low bow...I could see that the master of the house...thought me a very spirited, yet withal very impudent, little creature..."

Disraeli disports himself before Sir Robert Peel,

Punch Volume VIII (1845) page 155.



aristocracy, in order to rally the people to them, waved the proletarian alms-bag in front for a banner. But the people, so often as it joined them, saw on their hindquarters the old feudal coat of arms..." So said Karl Marx (119). And I think elsewhere that seminal work says all that need be said about the political motivation of conservative socialism: "To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics... This form of socialism has, moreover, been worked out into complete systems... They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The bourgeoisie naturally conceives the world in which it is supreme to be the best..." (120)

The social-problem novels of Mrs. Gaskell, for all their frequent tone of prison visitor or bringer of meals-on-wheels, do seem to be able to get at closer quarters to working life and problems, but by the time Mary Barton appeared in 1848 the decade was near its close. To see these early novels of Dickens in the context of the other fiction of this decade is immediately to see his contribution to literature. The England Dickens describes is minatory - as a nation, and as individuals - the English have somehow got on to the wrong track. Money-mad, selfish, impersonal, anonymous, mechanical, turbulent, cruel - such was the England he saw, and he begged it to have a care of itself. He sensed that a whole order was passing away and being replaced by something he viewed with little confidence.

He had seen Birmingham and Wolverhampton (121) and the result was the allegory of The Old Curiosity Shop. "I sit down to write to you without an atom of news to communicate. Yes I have something that will surprise you, who are pent up in dark and dismal Lincoln's-Inn-fields. It is the brightest day you ever saw. The sun is sparkling on the water so that I can hardly bear to look at it. The tide is in, and the fishing boats are dancing like mad. Upon the green-topped cliffs the corn is cut and piled in shocks; and thousands of butterflies are fluttering about..." Thus he communicates to Forster the lively pleasure in the natural landscape (122) and in the novels he set out to communicate his pleasure in what was warm, human, natural - and his fear of the hard, encroaching materialism of the time, with its attendant loss of the family unit, personal contacts and real humanity. Only weeks separate Dickens' conception of the idea for The Chimes (123) and Sir Robert Peel's letter to Queen Victoria on the subject of the 1844 Factory Act. Dickens was deeply shocked and disturbed by what he saw in the industrial parts of England and by what he read in the government reports on the conditions of child labour and the exploitation of girls and women, lent him by Dr. Southwood Smith (124). Dickens wrote of his visit to the Midlands in October 1838 that "miles of cinder paths and blazing furnaces and roaring steam engines" loomed through the fog and smoke like some enormous Alberich's cave of clamorous glares, and that "such a mass of dirt gloom and misery as yet I never beheld." (125) Lord Ashley and his followers had tried to get the hours of labour limited to ten a day, and to impose restrictions on the age when children were to be put to work and the hours they were to labour.

Peel writes to the Queen "this additional restriction was opposed by your Majesty's servants on the ground that it exposed the manufacturers of this country to a very formidable competition with those of other countries, in which labour is not restricted.. ..the articles of cotton, woollen, silk and linen manufacture exported to foreign countries amount to thirty five millions out of forty four millions of our export trade;..it would incur great risk of injury to our commerce, and therefore to our means of employing manufacturing industry, were we to enact that the number of hours in the year devoted to labour should be diminished by five hundred... Your Majesty's servants have brought in a Bill limiting the hours...for young children to six and a half, and prohibiting the labour of all females and of all young persons below thirteen years of age for more than twelve hours. Lord Ashley proposed to limit the labour to ten hours a day, making a difference of ten hours of labour each week. On Saturday the labour at present is for nine hours only..." (126)

Real victory was denied the reformers for many years, by the shrewd, inhuman legalism of Judge Sir James (later Baron) Parke (1782-1869) who ruled that although the 1847 Act protected women and children from working longer than ten hours, the Act had not stated ten continuous hours, or the same ten hours. They could thus be brought in in relays, standing some off at one time and the others at another and the factories could consequently be run as far into the night as the owners wished. The protection they believed was granted them in 1847 was thus an illusion. Lawyer's trick this may have been, but it was not until 1874 that a clear ten hours was firmly and unequivocally legislated for (127).

This is one of the great puzzles of the period: how could intelligent, educated, sensitive men - such as Peel - be so callous? They seem to be quite without feelings for the sufferings of others. Cobden and Bright, supporters of so much else that strikes us in the 20th Century as just, fair and humanitarian, opposed the Ten Hour Bill in 1844 (128) as an attempt to interfere with the free bargaining for contract between employer and labour: the millowners were much more knowledgeable on the needs and wants of the workers than the southern reformers. I think part of the answer is that many people simply did not know what conditions were like. Facts, figures, government reports, oratory in the Commons was one thing, and in many cases it did not move. A knowledge of the reality was quite another matter. Even the obdurate Lord Palmerston was moved to pity for the plight of young cotton operatives once he was shown what they had to do. Some workmen called at his home at Carlton Gardens in 1843 and demonstrated with his household furniture the nature of their labours and its physical effects on their persons. They showed him the marks on their hands, "Look at my knee, my lord..." He was then won over and promised his support of the Ten Hour Bill (129). Palmerston also supported the Mines Act of 1842 (130) after his complacency had been disturbed by Lord Ashley.

Dickens felt himself in as compromising a position as Peel; clearly it was dreadful that human beings had to work so hard for many hours, but would it not be equally unfair to limit their earnings by preventing them working for more than ten hours? "... This question involves the whole subject of the condition of

the mass of people in this country", he wrote to Dr. Southwood Smith, "And I greatly fear that until governments are honest, and Parliaments pure, and great men less considered, and small men more so, it is almost a cruelty to limit even the dreadful hours and wages of labour which at this time prevail. Want is so general, distress so great, and poverty so rampant - it is, in a word, so hard for the million to live by any means - that I scarcely know how we can step between them and one weekly farthing. The necessity of a mighty change, I clearly see; and yet I cannot reconcile it to myself to reduce the earnings of any family - their means of existence being so very scant and spare..." (131)

It is charitable to assume that the middle and upper classes simply did not know the living and working conditions of the artisan and lower classes. This point is made by Mrs. Gaskell in the Preface to the Original Edition of Mary Barton (1848) and discussed at some length in the body of the novel: "It is so impossible to describe...the state of distress which prevailed...that I will not attempt it; and yet I think again that surely, in a Christian land, it was not known even so feebly as words could tell it, or the more happy and fortunate would have thronged with their sympathy and their aid..." (132) The same point is made by Edwin Chadwick, who noted how shocked, surprised, taken aback, men were to learn of the condition of the poor: "The statements of the condition of considerable proportions of the labouring population...have been received with surprise by persons of the wealthier classes living in the immediate vicinity, to whom the facts were as strange as if

related to foreigners or the natives of an unknown country..."

(133) The key words here are strange, foreign, unknown - which point towards Marx's classic concept of die Entfremdung in society. Mrs. Gaskell in the same passage referred to above, actually cites "the feeling of alienation between the different classes of society." (134). It seems to have been Dickens' particular task to make people aware of the state of their own brothers. One has only to recall Podsnap's characteristic dismissals of unpleasant facts and problems - "I don't believe it" and "Then it was their own fault" and "I do not admit these things" and "It is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence" (135) - to see how well Dickens epitomised the venomous indifference of the haves to the have-nots. This was a Dickensian theme present from Barnaby Rudge, The Old Curiosity Shop and running right through his work. The animating spirit of most of his fictions is the desire to let people know what is really going on. Scrooge's second visitor in cautioning him about the cant of "surplus population" tells him to wait until he has "discovered what the surplus is, and Where it is..." (136). In this respect the novelist probably performed a great service, for despite the significant work of Joseph Kay, Engels, Southwood Smith and Mayhew, it was not until the work of Booth and Rowntree in the last decades of the century that we had reliable estimates of numbers living in poverty (137). Though not a statistician, social theorist or economist, Dickens dutifully and vividly helped create a climate in which indifference and selfishness were called into question. This I would certainly rate as one of Dickens' main contributions to the art of the novel; to see what is happening, to experience the life of the

The Milk of Poor-Law "Kindness".

Cartoon by Kenny Meadows

Punch Volume IV (1843) page 47.

PUNCH'S PENCILINGS.—No. LXII.



THE "MILK" OF POOR-LAW "KINDNESS."

time, and to create a literary form to express these observations and experiences. This is what he did. This makes him stand head and shoulders above other novelists of the early 1840's, and makes his achievement so remarkable (138).

CHAPTER TWO

THE CITY CHILD

" 'Tis strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. He awakens no sympathy in the breast of any single person; his existence is a matter of interest to no one save himself, and he cannot be said to be forgotten when he dies, for no one remembered him when he was alive."

Thoughts about People, Sketches by Boz.

"I look down into all that wasp-nest or beehive," have we heard him say, "and witness their wax-laying and honey-making...That living flood, pouring through these streets, of all qualities and ages, knowest though whence it is coming, whither it is going? Aus der Ewigkeit, zu der Ewigkeit hin:- From Eternity, onwards to Eternity! These are Apparitions: what else? Are they not Souls rendered visible: in Bodies, that took shape and will lose it, melting into air?..."

"Oh, under that hideous coverlet of vapours, and putrefactions, and unimaginable gases, what a Fermenting-vat lies simmering and hid! The joyful and the sorrowful are there; men are dying there, men are being born; men are praying, - on the other side of a brick partition, men are cursing; and around them all is the vast, void Night. The proud Grandee still lingers in his perfumed saloons. Wretchedness cowers into truckle-beds, or shivers hunger stricken into its lair of straw... Gay mansions, with supper-rooms, and dancing-rooms, are full of light and music...but, in the Condemned Cells, the pulse of life beats tremulous and faint... Riot cries aloud...and the Mother, with streaming hair, kneels over her pallid dying infant... All these heaped and huddled together, with nothing but a little carpentry and masonry between them; - crammed in, like salt fish in their barrel...such work goes on under that smoke-counterpane! - But I, mein Werther, sit above it all; I am alone with the Stars."

We looked in his face to see whether, in the utterance of such extraordinary Night-thoughts, no feeling might be traced there; but with the light we had...nothing save that old calmness was visible...

Thomas Carlyle: Sartor Resartus (1831) Book I, Chapter iii

Great writers are seldom complacent about the nature and quality of life they find around them. In the words of Martin Malia, "individuals who take thought seriously experience an alienation which arises from a tension between the ideal and the real..." (1). Dickens is no utopographer, he is no Condorcet, Comte, Marx or Wells, he does not portray the ideal society, the perfect world; as is the case with many writers of genius, he seems to be an outsider, the product of his period, but basically out of step with it, but convinced there is much wrong with what he sees around him; and yet Dickens does not condemn the whole of Victorian society outright, his works are not an indictment of a whole age. It is debatable whether he was any more against "Victorianism" than he was in favour of some of its basic assumptions. To be sure, the sum total effect of Dickens' works is that we are experiencing a world where all is not well. It is emphatically not the best of all possible worlds, but, although I cannot subscribe to the smug list of Professor Ricks' - "self respect, duty, deference and the gentleman" (2), I think some of the things Dickens truly admires - and calls upon us to admire - such as kindness, tolerance, family loyalty, humility, conviviality, sentiment and contentment, are also typically Victorian; the main thesis of Dr. John Lucas' book The Melancholy Man will not really hold (3). Where Dickens speaks in his truest voice, he speaks of the human condition in general, not particularised in any single moment in time: I refer to such strokes as Arthur Clennam's legal adviser's cajoling him after his financial ruin: "...As your professional adviser, I should prefer your being taken on a writ from one of the Superior Courts... It looks better." (4) The catching of the very tone of life is perfect, and timeless.

His view of Victorian society seems to grow progressively gloomier, culminating in the magnificent artistic achievement of Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend. It is usually argued that little of this would be garnered from his earliest works. The gloomier and squalid scenes in The Sketches by Boz he writes as a detached observer, not a trenchant critic of a whole society. The aims of Pickwick Papers are modest enough. The author's object, he writes in the Preface to the original edition of 1836, "was to place before the reader a constant succession of characters and incidents; to paint them in as vivid colours as he could command; and to render them life-like and amusing" (5). When Mr. Pickwick gets up on the first morning of his travels, he looks out of the window "upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand, as far as the eye could reach, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way. 'Such', thought Mr. Pickwick, are the narrow views of those philosophers, who content with examining the things that lie before them, look not into the truths which are hidden beyond. As well might I be content to gaze on Goswell Street for ever, without one effort to penetrate to the hidden countries which on every side surround it.' And having given vent to this beautiful reflection, Mr. Pickwick proceeded to put himself into his clothes..." (6). We have earlier noted the confessed opinion of Mr. Pickwick was that "the praise of mankind was his swing and philanthropy was his insurance office" (7) and that he later describes himself as "an observer of human nature" (8). We do not expect, then, any penetrating scrutiny of society, and nor do we get it:

"We do not find, from a careful perusal of Mr. Pickwick's notes on the four towns, Stroud, Rochester, Chatham and Brompton, that his impressions of their appearance differ in any material point, from those of other travellers who have gone over the same ground," (9) Dickens comments. There is hardly any comment made as to how Pickwick got his money, "he retired from business, and is a gentleman of considerable independent property..." (10) is the limit of our knowledge on this point. There is in the book as a whole, little attempt to "penetrate" the hidden aspects of life, no attempt is made to look again or more closely at the England through which the Pickwickians make their happy progress. What satire there is - of law, prisons and so on - is incidental and fragmentary and certainly mild. The general tone of the book is "good-humoured" as Steven Marcus observed "no novel could move further than Pickwick Papers toward asserting not only that the Kingdom of God is within each man but that it is possible to establish something that resembles the Kingdom of God on earth..." (11).

Although reading Oliver Twist distressed the young Queen Victoria, who found the realism of Mr. Dickens painful (12), despite also its overt attacks on the results of applied Benthamism, and its vivid portraits of low and criminal life, it is yet a profoundly optimistic work; with its faith in individual philanthropy, bodied forth in the person of Mr. Brownlow. The narrative is essentially localised on Oliver, the amelioration of conditions is essentially individual. It is Oliver who must be saved and made happy, this is the concern of the story teller, not the structure of society which makes such things only

too possible: "How Mr. Brownlow went on, from day to day, filling the mind of his adopted child with stores of knowledge, and becoming attached to him, more and more, as his nature developed itself, and showed the thriving seeds of all he wished him to become - how he traced in him new traits of his early friend, that awakened in his own bosom old remembrances, melancholy and yet sweet and soothing...these are all matters which need not to be told. I have said that they were truly happy..."

(13). The happiness of Oliver and Mr. Brownlow seems to be a vital flaw in the execution of Dickens' avowed aims in Oliver Twist, the concern with the individual fate and fortunes of Oliver alone would not really have damaged the effect of the novel, or detracted in its overt purpose, but Dickens was betrayed by other intentions. The didactic purpose of the story was to show that the starvation and ill-treatment of children, the result of putting into effect the ideologies of Malthus and Bentham, was to produce ghastly effects on their characters, and in society as a whole. This being the case, Oliver should have become a villain and a wretch, but he doesn't. On the contrary, as Humphry House has suggested, he is always a paragon of sweet gratitude and the tenderest right feeling. When the denouement reveals that Oliver is in fact the son of an unhappy gentleman of means and the daughter of an officer in the navy, the bottom seems to be knocked out of Dickens' argument, for "are we to conclude that Dickens' main lesson was that a good heredity can overcome everything?" (14). His concern with Oliver has overshadowed his concern for the state of his country. We have the evidence of Dickens' letters and speeches to confirm his intense interest in the woeful effects of the new Poor Laws, but it is

to be lamented that satire so keen - Bumble's buttons having the emblem of the good Samaritan is a beautiful touch - should in the end be smothered by the needs of conventional sentimental fiction.

The concern of Nicholas Nickleby is still with individuals, we are not made to feel that Ralph, Squeers and Gride are symptoms of an evil, corrupting society; it is still very much a question of punishing the villains and rewarding the hero and heroine. Although even here there are signs that Dickens' view of society as a totality is less narrow, less localised on the hero and heroine of the story. The villainy of Ralph, his love of money, dominates the whole of the narrative structure of Nicholas Nickleby, but from time to time in the book we are made to notice what the scramble for money is doing to England, it is pressing them, crowding them, pushing them into cities - cities which are hell on earth. On the way home after his final exposure by the 'forces of good, Ralph passed a graveyard "...a rank, unwholesome rotten spot, where the very grass and weeds seemed, in their frowsy growth, to tell that they had sprung from paupers' bodies, and stuck their roots in the graves of men, sodden in steaming courts and drunken hungry dens. And here in truth they lay, parted from the living by a little earth and board or two - lay thick and close - corrupting in the body as they had in mind; a dense and squalid crowd. Here they lay, cheek by jowl with life: no deeper down than the feet of the throng that passed there every day..." (15). Here the parallel is drawn between the flesh and bones of departed throng, the depressed, down-trodden exploited masses who have given up the

unequal struggle to make enough to live, and living-dead, the busy, striving crowd of industrial, commercial, mechanised England. "The age we live in is a busy age" Bentham wrote before the turn of the 18th and 19th Centuries, but the advance towards total perfection he so confidently predicted did not materialise (16). The cost of this "busyness" described by Engels and bodied forth in fiction by Dickens is unendurable to contemplate. Engels, viewing England at the same period of time as Dickens in the novels here under discussion, noted the essential effects of competition which he said was to crowd those strivers, into a battle of life and death "fought not between the different classes of society only, but also between the individual members of these classes. Each is in the way of the other, and each seeks to crowd out all who are in his way. The workers are in constant competition among themselves as the members of the bourgeoisie among themselves..." (17).

The facts and figures are impressive, the increase of the population was one of the wonders of the age. Throughout the period here discussed the population not only increased, but concentrated itself in the town areas: London grew from 1,117,000 in 1801 to 1,600,000 in 1821 and by 1841 had reached 2,239,000 - it had more than doubled. In the same period Manchester grew from 75,000 to 252,000 (nearly trebled). Bradford grew from 13,000 to 67,000, Birmingham from 71,000 to 202,000, Glasgow from 77,000 to 287,000, Liverpool 82,000 to 299,000. By 1861 Manchester reached 399,000 and Birmingham 351,000 (18). But these figures may seem fairly mild when compared to the mushrooming of places like Middlesbrough: a community of four

houses and twenty five inhabitants in 1801, by 1841 it has a population of 5,463 and ten years later 7,431. When the 1861 Census was published, it revealed that in just over half a century it had grown to have a population of 19,416 housed in 3,203 dwellings (19). The poetic William Osburn read his verses before members of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society in 1857:

The aire below is doubly dyed and damned;
The aire above, with lurid smoke is crammed;
The one flows steaming foul as Charon's Styx,
Its poisonous vapours in the other mix.
These sable twins the murky town invest -
By them the skin's begrimed, the lungs oppressed.
How dear the penalty thus paid for wealth;
Obtained through wasted life and broken health.
The Joyful Sabbath comes! That blessed day,
When all seem happy, and when all seem gay!
Then toil has ceased, and then both rich and poor
Fly off to Harrogate, or Woodhouse Moor.
The one his villa and carriage keeps;
His squalid brother in a garret sleeps;
High flaunting forest trees, low crowding weeds,
Can this be Manchester? Or is it Leeds? (20)

The marvel of England's commercial greatness, Engels proposed in the 1840's was really human sacrifice "After roaming the streets of the capital for a day or two, making headway with difficulty through the human turmoil... After visiting the slums of the metropolis, one realises for the first time that

these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature... The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes...crowding past one another, are they not all human beings...with the same interest in being happy? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common..." (21).

Dickens' vision has the lucidity of an outsider's. Dickens' insistence on the modern city, the centre of the modern capitalist society's place of operations, as something hellish, crowded and unwholesome, really puts him in company with Blake, Wordsworth, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and other nineteenth century men of imagination, perception and vision who felt disquiet at the alleged wonders of the modern age (22), whose "unifying factor was a certain dissatisfaction, a humanist concern... The differences between the Songs of Innocence and Experience and Dombey and Son, or between Culture and Anarchy and Hard Times, is more a question of method than intention.(23) A theme which finds its counterpart in the writers of the twentieth century: James Joyce's description of the capital of Ireland as a Labyrinth, a maze of anonymous streets which one must escape from; T.S. Eliot's modern London:

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many. (24)

and W.H. Auden's fearful description of city life in the 1930's:

Full as a theatre is the foul thoroughfare: some sitting like
sacks, some slackly standing,
Their faces grey in the glimmering gaslight: their eyeballs
drugged like a dead rabbit's
From a window a child is looking, by want so fretted his face
has assumed the features of a tortoise:
A human forest: all by one infection cancelled.
Despair so far invading every tissue has destroyed in these the
hidden of the desire and the intelligence... (25)

Many of the prescient intuitions of literary artists in the last century have been proven scientific realities by twentieth century sociologists and anthropologists. The alienation which city life fosters, one of Dickens' major and constant themes, is now an accepted commonplace of sociology. In the nineteen thirties a study was carried out in Chicago which has now become a classic of sociological investigation. Chicago for the purposes of this investigation was divided into eleven types of area, comprising one hundred and twenty subcommunities and rates were established for each one. Without exception the rates were high in the centre, and declined as one moved away from centre: in the centre there were three hundred and sixty two cases per thousand of schizophrenia, which graded down to fifty five point four cases on the periphery; in the centre there were two hundred and forty cases per thousand of alcoholic psychosis, and only sixty cases per thousand on the outskirts; crime, suicide and drug-taking all showed a similar graph, high in the centre, declining as one moved away.(26)

Cities also tend to destroy the integration of the family unit - another fundamental Dickensian theme. The same Chicago experiment demonstrated that first generation Polish communities, which had a well-knit family life, had a relatively low incidence of crime, mental sickness and social instability. But second generation Polish men and women, placed as they were in a delicate balance between their own social culture and the social culture of the new world, were very frequently prone to instability. Coloured races showed the same pattern, well-adjusted when living in all-black areas, but with high psychotic rates in mixed areas (27).

Dickens seems well aware of the de-humanizing quality of the city, and we find this in Nicholas Nickleby, Barnaby Rudge, as well as in the novels of the 1850's and 1860's (28).

It is essential, I believe, to be aware of the continuity in Dickens' work. We cannot dismiss the novels written before Dombey as inferior "prentice work" - comedies tossed off to gain bread and butter while the novelist matured towards the great satiric tasks of the works following Bleak House. These early works are far more seriously to be considered in Dickens' euvre, than - for example - The Taming of the Shrew or Titus in the case of Shakespeare. As early as Nickleby Dickens demonstrates that he is quite concerned at the standards of the new age. "My conduct has been, and ever will be," declaims the oily politician Gregsbury, "regulated by a sincere regard for the true and real interests of this great and happy country. Whether I look at home or abroad, whether I behold the peaceful industrious

communities of our island home, her rivers covered with steam-boats, her roads with locomotives, her streets with cabs... whether I look merely at home, or stretching my eyes further, contemplate the boundless prospect of conquest and possession... which is outspread before me, I clasp my hands, and turning my eyes to the broad expanse above my head, exclaim, 'Thank Heaven, I am a Briton'..." (29). We are made to feel that sure that "happy" "peaceful" "magnitude" would not be Dickens' words to describe the England he found around him. The cost of this magnitude and expansion the novelist makes quite explicit in the Chapter on Hampton races in the same work. He describes the grubby but glowing and cheerful faces of the gipsy children at the races, and underlines the contrast between these children of nature, and the maimed children of modern industrialised society. "It was one of those scenes of life and animation, caught in its very brightest and freshest moment, which scarcely fail to please; for if the eye be tired of show and glare, or the ear be weary with a ceaseless round of noise, the one may repose, turn almost where it will, on eager, happy, and expectant faces... Even the sunburnt faces of gipsy children...suggest a drop of comfort. It is a pleasing thing to see that the sun has been there; to know that the air and light are on them every day; to feel that they are children and lead children's lives; that if their pillows be damp, it is with the dews of Heaven, and not with tears; that the limbs of their girls are free, and that they are not crippled by distortions, imposing an unnatural and horrible penance upon their sex; that their lives are spent from day to day at least among the waving trees, and not in the midst of dreadful engines which make young children old before

Capital and Labour.

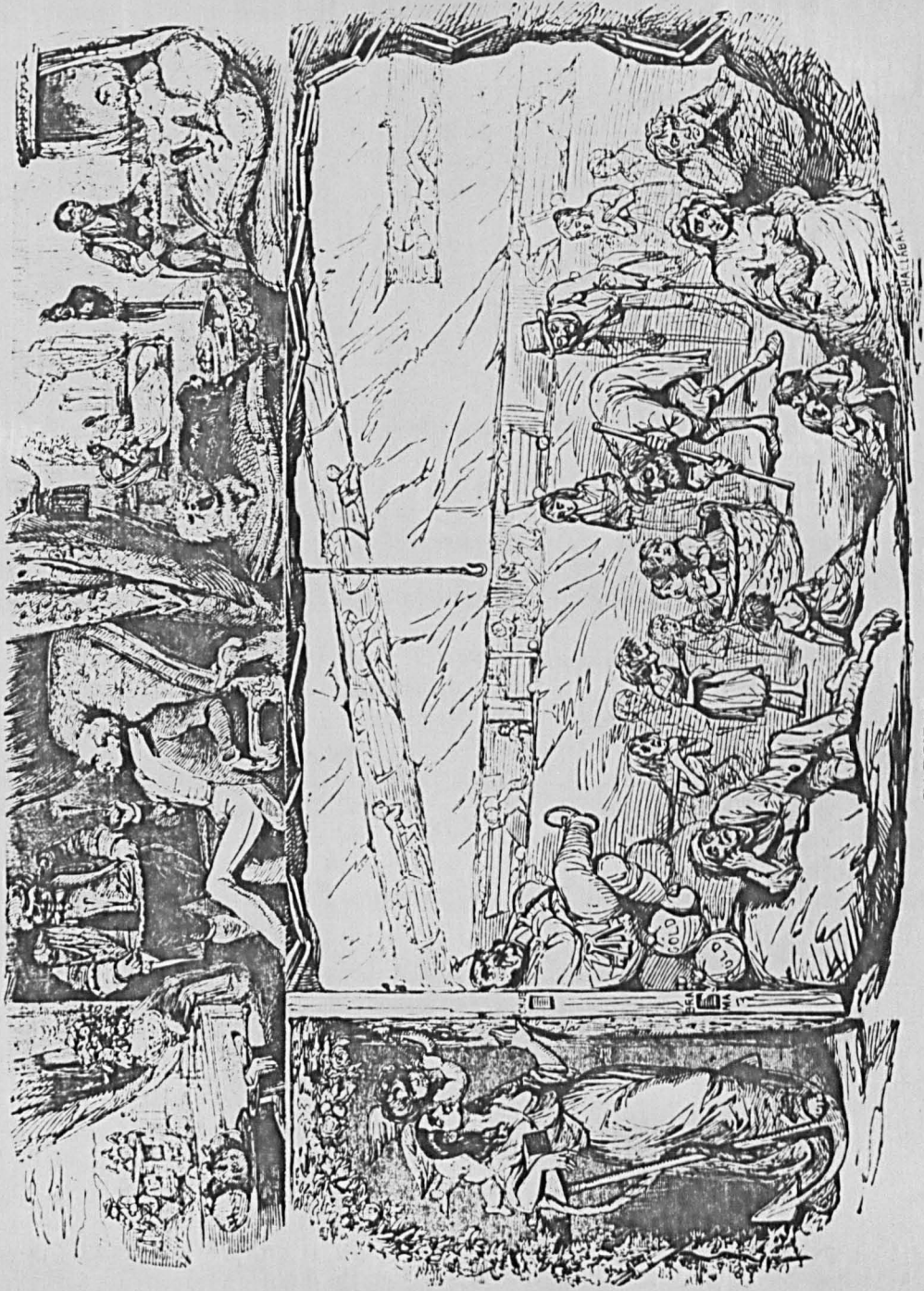
"It is gratifying to know that though there is much misery in the coalmines...there is a great deal of luxury results from it. The public mind has been a good deal shocked by very offensive representations of certain underground operations, carried on by an inferior race of human beings...but Punch's artist has endeavoured to do away with the disagreeable impression, by showing the very refined and elegant result..." Punch Volume V (1843) pages 48-9.

"Twenty pounds of wool converted unobtrusively into the yearly clothing of a labourer's family by its own industry in the intervals of other work - this makes no show; but bring it to market, send it to the factory, thence to the broker, thence to the dealer, and you will have great commercial operations... The working class is thus amerced to support a wretched factory population, a parasitical shopkeeping class, and a fictitious, commercial, monetary and financial system." David Urqhart: Familiar Words (1858) page 120.

"...simple co-operation leaves the individual's methods of work substantially unaltered; manufacture revolutionises these methods... It transforms the worker into a cripple, a monster..."

Marx: Capital Part Four, Section 5, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (1967) page 381.

CARTOON, N^o. V.



CAPITAL AND LABOUR.

they know what childhood is, and give them the exhaustion and infirmity of age, without, like age, the privilege to die..." (30). To this, we are obviously expected to place in contrast the view of London in the same novel: a city without warmth, sun, light, humanity or vital life. Smike and Nicholas look back on the city, and we are made to see the city through their eyes - it is a centre of civilisation which we feel is a travesty of the natural life our creator wanted us to live: "It was by this time within an hour of noon, and although a dense vapour still enveloped the city they had left, as if the very breath of its busy people hung over their schemes of gain and profit and found greater attraction there than in the quiet region above, in the open country it was clear and fair. Occasionally in some low spots they came upon patches of mist which the sun had not yet driven from their strongholds...it was pleasant to look down and see how the sluggish mass rolled heavily off before the cheering influence of day. A broad, fine, honest sun lighted up the green pastures and dimpled water with the semblance of summer... The ground seemed elastic under their feet; the sheep bells were music in their ears..." (31). However conventional some of Dickens' expressions are, the sound of tinkling sheep-bells for example is heavily literary (how far would the travellers have had to walk from London in the 1830's in order to hear sheep-bells? - a journey of several hours I would think) he makes his point insistently: the city is associated with stultification, darkness, damp, fog - it is essentially a morbid place. The country is sun-lit, bright and alive. The real contrast is between the crowded loneliness of the town, and the companionship of the country. The Eden theme is to be a constant one in Dickens' novels.

However obvious, stylised or crude some of Dickens' symbolic representations of this theme may be - we think of Dingley Dell, Little Nell's flight from the horrors of London and the idealised pastoral landscape she and her Grandfather traverse, the rural peace of the West Country in Martin Chuzzlewit, the haven of peace and community which Barnaby and his mother seek and find in Barnaby Rudge - we must recognise that Dickens has grasped a fundamental and basic truth about the way the world was going, and he was one of the earliest writers to see it. Strange as it may seem in some respects, he is here following Rousseau, who had written in the seventeen sixties that "men are not made to be crowded together in ant-hills, but scattered over the earth... The more they are massed together, the more corrupt they become." (32), and Wordsworth had referred to "the dissolute city" (33). The idea of the corrupting nature of crowds, cities, mobs - whether in schools, jails, capitals, was a commonplace by the nineteenth century, shared by Cobbett, Cooke Taylor, Richard Oastler, Horace Mann, Lord Shaftesbury, J.A. Froude (34). Dickens' originality lies in his making it a constant and unifying theme in his fiction, it is an essential part of what is called "the world of Dickens". The need for air, light, freshness, for what Wordsworth called the simple fraternities or in Crabbe's words "the simple life that Nature yields" (35), these are the things we find Dickens mentioning again and again in letters at this time. (36). He writes to Maclise that he is dead in spirit, "for Heaven's sake let us range the fields and get some freshness, if it's only rain..." (37) and from Broadstairs he writes to Forster of "the brightest day you ever saw." (38) It is this love of the unspoiled, the

innocent quality in life which, as Professor Steven Marcus so rightly demonstrates (39) is the essence of Pickwick.

"Pleasant, pleasant country," says Mr. Pickwick, "who could live to gaze from day to day on bricks and slates, who had once felt the influence of a scene like this? Who could continue to exist, where there are no cows, but the cows on the chimney pots; nothing redolent of Pan but pan-tiles; no crop but stone crop?" (40). And there is the dirty and dismal impression Bristol makes on Mr. Winkle (41). We find it again in the tranquility of Canterbury in David Copperfield: David associates his mother's picture with "the sunny streets of Canterbury, dozing...in the hot light; and with the site of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers..." (42). In this novel Canterbury seems to stand for the peace and security of pre-industrial, pre-commercial England: "Coming into Canterbury, I loitered through the old streets with a sober pleasure that calmed my spirits... The venerable Cathedral towers, and the old jackdaws and rooks whose airy voices made them more retired than perfect silence would have done; the battered gateways once stuck full with statues...the ancient houses, the pastoral landscape of field, orchard, and garden; everywhere...I felt the same serene air, the same calm, thoughtful, softening spirit" (43). And later in the same novel: "Early in the morning I sauntered through the dear old tranquil streets... The rooks were sailing about the Cathedral towers; and the towers themselves overlooking many a long unaltered mile of the rich country and its pleasant streams were cutting the bright morning air, as if there were no such thing as change on earth..." (44). The ancient city of Lancaster is described in much the same terms in

The Lazy Tour of the Two Idle Apprentices (1857) and seems to stand for much the same kind of thing, a venerable past which honoured and revered the best things in life and respected the nature and dignity of man. (45) Throughout his life, cathedral towns offer him a kind of memory-stimulant of the past, and they "evoke a nostalgic, almost elegiac tone from the death-haunted depths of memory... He summons the sights and feelings of a distant day, but the day itself has fled, and with it a portion of the world's freshness and glory... These journeys into the past are also journeys into romance...versions of the romantic picturesque... Childhood haunts and activities glow in the soft multicoloured penumbra of a romantic haze..." (46). The opening article of a series on The Doom of English Wills which Dickens published in Household Words in September 1850 begins with another of these familiar portraits of undisturbed, rural-ancient English township: "...Seen in the distance, rising from among corn-fields, pastures, orchards, gardens, woods, the river ...and haply the ruins of a castle or abbey..." and a few lines later we come upon the expected reference to "grave rooks...that have built their nests in steeple crevices..." (47). These towers, crumbling ruins and cawing rooks are a constant, obsessional group of images in Dickens' imagination, recalling and picturing in the mind the peace, gentleness and good order of the past: it does not matter a scrap to me if this "Cockney pastoralism" of Dickens is stereotyped, obvious or repetitious - what is important to us is to note that Dickens stated this case, living as he did, while these changes were actually happening, as Manchester, Birmingham and "Coketown" grew and spread like murrain-plague. Almost the very last words he wrote that

June afternoon in 1870 present once more the scene of the old English cathedral town: "A brilliant morning shines in the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with a lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods and fields - or rather, from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time - penetrate into the Cathedral...and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold grey tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building..." (48).

"Change is inevitable. In a progressive country change is constant" Disraeli told an audience at Edinburgh in 1867 (49) and Macaulay had assured his readers that "those who compare the age in which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in an imagination, may talk of degeneracy and decay; but no man who is correctly informed as to the past, will be disposed to take a morose view of the present..." (50), but many contemporaries were not so sanguine: Henri Frederic Amiel (1821-1881) recorded in his Journal Intime in 1851 that "the epoch of the ant hill, of life in multiplicity, is beginning..." (51). We who live in this century are seeing that some of Dickens' worst fears and imaginings are actually coming to pass. In Pierre, or The Ambiguities (1852) Melville discusses the idea of a world the entire land area of which is paved and made into roads. Professor Kevin Lynch, Professor of City Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology described the hideous dream of the whole world urbanised into one vast city, and

rhetorically - and I think, unnecessarily - asks "Would not this world, entirely man-made, be utterly alien to man?" (52). The same disturbing idea of the world as one vast urbanised area, is exploited in J.G. Ballard's terrifying story The Concentration City (53). A young man designs a flying machine, something completely forgotten in this projected "future" city where there is no space to try out such things because there are so many buildings. He gets on a train intending to travel right to the end of the circuit where he is sure there must be some free space. After ten days the train brings him back to where he started. "I want to build a flying machine... There must be free space somewhere... The City must have bounds..." (54). This, as Kingsley Amis has discussed, is a recurring theme in science fiction, (55). In today's America, which many fear as tomorrow's western world, the final phase of the war between man and his technology seems to be reached: "...man has become the victim of his own technology...he can no longer progress without endangering his entire way of life...(it has to be decided) to build a new power station. If the building is not done immediately...New York City will not have enough power to run itself. If the power station is built, then it is known in advance that its huge chimneys belching sulphurous fumes into the already polluted atmosphere...may be responsible for countless cases of lung disease and even death...nuclear or hydro-electric (power stations) would probably pollute the city's water instead of its air...it is hard to understand why the business and industrialists who have nurtured the American ideal that economic growth and progress are synonymous did not foresee the inevitability... if the New York air is prevented from getting dirtier at the

expense of its electricity supply...computers will run hay-wire, jeopardising New York's entire banking system and the subway trains...will break down. If the subway system...gets any more unreliable, then thousands of commuters will switch to driving cars...adding to the most deadly air pollution of all..." (56). All this may seem a long way from the early works of fiction of Charles Dickens, but the pointers are certainly there: from the very beginnings of his art he shows an interest in the multiplicity of life, the alienation which modern city life has created (57) the loneliness of modern life and the erosion of the beautiful by the mechanical; the horrors of Hard Times are foreshadowed by the novels of the late 1830's. Dickens was well aware that modern life, with its unshakable belief in economic and technical advancement, has - in Arthur Koestler's phrase - turned us into actors or chorus in a global tragedy without our being aware of it (58). How aptly Dr. George Steiner categorises "the Megalopolis whose uncontrollable cellular division and spread now threatens to choke so much of our lives. Hence the definition of a new, major conflict: that between the individual and the stone sea that may, at any moment, overwhelm him. The urban inferno, with its hordes of faceless inhabitants, haunts the nineteenth century imagination..." (59).

Oliver Twist is an examination of the horrors of loneliness and alienation; we note the sadness Oliver feels when he leaves his little friends to go into the workhouse: "they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great world sank into the child's heart for the first time..." (60). It is significant that Oliver's punishment for

asking for more was that he was made more lonely: he is confined to a dark and solitary room "consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board" and he cried all day, when "the long dismal night came on (he) spread his little hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corner, tried to sleep: every and anon waking with a start and tremble, and drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him." (61). At the coffin-maker's his loneliness and isolation is stressed by Dickens (62) and when he runs away from Sowerberry's his "lonesomeness and desolation" are emphasised as he creeps into Barnet (63). Oliver had lamented his loneliness to Bumble even before he was employed at Mr. Sowerberry's (64). Oliver's situation is accompanied by metaphors of winter, desolation and death. As his fortunes change, under the guidance of his saviours, he seems to be given the sun once more - the significance of Rose's name, Maylie should not be neglected. The villains of the piece seem to exist in a gloomy and sunless atmosphere, Sikes is always found at night time, in public houses "where a flaring gas-light burnt all day in the winter time: and where no ray of sun ever shone in the summer..." (65). The metaphor is continued in the scene where Sikes tries to prevent the sun shining into the murder-room "He tried to shut it out, but it would stream in..." (66). Fagin is frequently presented in terms of night, slime, offal and so on. The theme of the battle between goodness, innocence, purity and evil, knowingness and corruption is a constant one in Dickens' novels: frequently goodness is represented by a child, a child placed in a metropolis of cynical evil -

"one need be sharp in this town, my dear...and that's the truth" Fagin says (67). Dickens, of course, is deservedly celebrated for his delineations of childhood, and it was quite natural that he should use the central figure of the child as a symbol of the individual and the world. (68) As Professor Adrian points out, the unhappy and neglected child becomes for Dickens the image of injustice, and indictment of the national economy. With his own ineradicable memories of the sufferings of his childhood, it was natural and easy for him to write about the injustices suffered by children: "In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice. It may be only small injustice...but the child is small, and its world is small ...". Thus reflects the humiliated Pip in Great Expectations (69) but these are the words of a man who suffered in childhood.

The symbolic figure of the child has an especial significance for Dickens; this is particularly the case with the novels of the 1840's, Barnaby, Nell, Tiny Tim, Paul Dombey and his sister. The child works as a double symbol, concerned with the child-in-the-family (a plea for the unity and love in the natural domestic order) and also as a symbol of man in a society which grows indifferent to him. The relevance of this symbolic structure in a writer like Dickens who was so vividly conscious of his own childhood hardly needs stressing. He seems particularly absorbed in his childhood past in the 1840's, a return to the past which culminated in the achievement of David Copperfield, the last novel of this amazing decade (70).

CHAPTER THREE

THE WORLD OF NELL

"Too much commerce may injure a nation as well as too little: and there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire."

Goldsmith: Citizen of the World i.98.

"Whilst the engine runs, the people must work - men, women and children yoked together with iron and steam. The animal machine...is chained so fast to the iron machine, which knows no suffering and weariness."

James Kay-Shuttleworth: reported comment 1832, quoted in Gillian Avery Victorian People (1970) p.171.

(i)

Of all Dickens' output, The Old Curiosity Shop probably presents modern readers with the greatest difficulty, and no other novel shows so clearly the tendency to dramatic shifts in the popularity of the novels. At the time of its appearance, and for some years afterwards, it was among his most popular works. Master Humphrey's Clock began selling at 70,000 copies per issue and then slumped badly; with the appearance of the story of Little Nell sales picked up, and reached a regular 100,000 before the novel ended (1). Pickwick Papers at its height only reached a level of 40,000 per issue (2). Washington Irving admired it (3). Edward Fitzgerald, Edgar Allan Poe, Daniel O'Connell, Sydney Smith, Thomas Hood, Walter Savage Landor, Thomas Carlyle, Lord Jeffrey all admired it (4). Jeffrey said of it, that Dickens had now shown that he was "with Shakespeare the greatest of English writers, though indeed his women are superior to Shakespeare's. No one of our poets comes near him." There had been nothing so good as Nell since Cordelia, Jeffrey claimed (5). The reference to Cordelia is interesting, and will be developed later. At this time Francis Lord Jeffrey (1773-1850) was regarded as the greatest living critic, acute and impartial (6). Although earlier in his career Jeffrey was well described as a "despiser of sentimentalism" (7) by the 1840's it seems he was able to accept what seems to many modern readers to be maudlin: the tear-jerking children so loathed by Henry James, Jeffrey loved them all. Of Tiny Tim he said he was "almost as touching as Nelly." (8) Alexander Smith, the Scottish poet (1830-1867) praised Nell and her kind in his essays Dreamthorp published in 1863. The book seemed to have the power to go straight to the heart, as is

curiously witnessed by Bret Harte's poem Dickens in Camp:

Above the pines the moon was slowly drifting,
The river sang below;
The dim Sierras, far beyond, uplifting
Their minarets of snow:

The roaring camp fire, with rude humour, painted
The ruddy tints of health
On haggard face and form that drooped and fainted
In the fierce race for wealth;

Till one arose, and from his pack's scant treasure
A hoarded volume drew,
And cards were dropped from hands of listless leisure
To hear the tale anew;

And then, while round them shadows gathered faster,
And as the firelight fell,
He read aloud the book wherein the Master
Had writ of "Little Nell":

Perhaps 'twas boyish fancy - for the reader
Was the youngest of them all, -
But, as he read, from clustering pine and cedar
A silence seemed to fall;

The fir trees gathered closer in the shadows,
Listened in every spray,
While the whole camp, with "Nell" on English meadows,
Wandered and lost their way:

And so in mountain solitudes - o'ertaken
As by some spell divine -
Their cares dropped from them like the needles shaken
From out the gusty pine.

Lost is that camp, and wasted all its fire;
And he who wrought that spell?
Ah, towering pines and stately Kentish spire,
Ye have one tale to tell!

Lost is that camp, but let its fragrant story
Blend with the breath that thrills
With hop-vines' incense all the pensive glory
That fills the Kentish hills.

And on that grave where English oak and holly
And laurel wreaths entwine,
Deem it not all a too presumptuous folly, -
This spray of western pine!

Thus were the rough miners moved to lay aside their cards
and hear the tale of Little Nell (9). Forster believed that

Frontispiece to Master Humphrey's Clock.



Dickens would have been touched deeply by this tribute to Nell's ability to affect "the rudest and least civilised of competitors in that far fierce race for wealth." (10)

Edward Heavisides said "It must be a hard heart indeed that can read with indifference the history of the life and death of this promising child," (11) but it was not long before such hard-hearted readers greatly outnumbered those who were moved to tears. "One must have a heart of stone," said Oscar Wilde - merely outrageously voicing sophisticated opinion by the end of the century - "to read the death of Little Nell without laughing." (12) Fitzjames Stephens was one of the earliest to notice what has become a commonplace of critical treatment of the Nell scenes in this novel in this century (or at least since Edmund Wilson) that is the morbid, almost pathological obsession Dickens seems to show for his heroine, especially her death scene. He said that the novelist "gloats over the girl's death as if it delighted him; he looks at it...touches, tastes, smells and handles it as if it was some savoury dainty which could not be too fully appreciated." (13) Mrs. Oliphant, (14) Blackwood's Magazine, (15) G.H. Lewes (16) are only the most notable of those who denounce Nell. Swinburn found Nell as believable as a "child with two heads".

In our century, the credit of Little Nell has reached an all time low level. One obvious way to attack Nell, and indeed the whole performance, is to adopt the time honoured methods of the lawyer, and discredit the witnesses. Without hesitation Professor K.J. Fielding attacks: "In discussing Little Nell one

can hardly go on to the defensive; yet it is hardly enough to argue that she was enormously popular at the time...without trying to condemn the whole age, there is something peculiar about almost all Dickens' well-known contemporaries who enlisted as her admirers - Macaulay, Washington Irving, Sydney Smith, Landor, Hans Anderson, Carlyle, Jeffrey, John Forster and Edward Fitzgerald. They were all quasi-bachelors, sick-at-heart, and denied the love of children... She appealed to a strain of self-pity and the lack of something in these men; and it is this, and the rather monotonous writing which attempts to hide it, that justifies those who dislike her..." (17).

Even though he goes on after this passage to say that the novel in some ways was welcome as something fresh and new, the vicious impression of that attack is hard to erase. Of all Dickens' characters, and of all Dickens' novels, Nell and The Old Curiosity Shop tend to be given the shortest critical shift, critics either annihilate it, or simply don't mention it. Aldous Huxley (18), Mark Spilka (19), Edmund Wilson (20) and Philip Collins are almost wholly condemnatory. Most critics place the emphasis on the death of Nell, and Professor Collins is no exception (21). He spends much debate on the absence of any sexiness in Nell, which he cannot understand, as she arouses hope in Swiveller, lust in Quilp and affection in Kit Nubbles: although it is an entertaining speculation, the possible effects on the novel if Nell had been portrayed as an embryo nymphomaniac are completely irrelevant in the study of this novel (22). Gabriel Pearson, in an extremely valuable discussion of the novel, asks - flawed as it so obviously is - whether it is beyond redemption (23)? but does not really seem prepared to

answer his own question. He seems prepared to accept uncritically the theory, started originally by Edmund Wilson (24) that Nell was based on the character of his wife's younger sister, Mary, and that Dickens really loved her. She died on May 7th 1837. On Saturday night, May 6th, Dickens, his wife, Catherine and Mary had gone to St. James' Theatre together and had a thoroughly enjoyable evening. After returning home and wishing one another good night, Dickens heard Mary cry out in pain. He ran to her bedroom, followed by his wife, and the doctor was sent for. The doctor could not help. In Dickens' own words "(she) sank under the attack and died - died in such a calm and gentle sleep, that although I had held her in my arms for some-time before, when she was certainly living (for she swallowed a little brandy from my hand) I continued to support her lifeless form, long after her soul had fled to Heaven... This was about three o'clock on the Sunday afternoon. They think her heart was diseased..." (25). Dickens' grief was intense. For months he could not work. He frequently visited her grave. He dreamed of her for months (26). The Wilson theory is that Dickens loved his sister Fanny as a child, and that the happiest period of his childhood is associated with her (27) and that although he married Catherine Hogarth, it was her sister Mary whom he really loved, because in loving her he was able to recapture his happy incestuous childhood love for his sister: and that in the portrait of Nell Dickens publically, and yet secretly, makes love to this ideal young girl, who is at once lover and sister. It is a fascinating piece of argument, and widely accepted. The theory reaches its apotheosis in Jack Lindsay's Charles Dickens (1950) where he states that Dickens'

feelings for Mary Hogarth were conditioned by his sister-complex. When alone with Mary, he says Dickens "felt himself returned to his own innocent childhood" and that the creation of Nell was "mithridatic" - the symbolic representation of a painful experience, a catharsis for the artist of a situation which had become oppressive. This is also echoed by Lionel Trilling (28). Gabriel Pearson even goes so far as to describe poor Nell as "an early Victorian Lolita" (29).

Those critics in our century who have attempted to defend Nell, and the whole novel, have not had an easy task. Nor, on balance, have they been very convincing. Paul Elmer Moore claimed that few could withhold their tears from this "picture of perfect meekness and gentleness fading flower-like in the breath of adversity...we seem to hear...the cry of the Greek stage, 'Alas, oh generations of men'...the reader is softened and broadened by association with the ancient pity of human life..." (30) but he does not really convince many readers. Professor Edgar Johnson attempted to demonstrate the validity of the whole novel as a symbolic portrait of the sacrifice of the nation's youth in industrial conditions (31). "Everywhere in mine and mill and factory profits took their toll of maimed bodies and gaunt frames and embittered hearts, and exacted dreadful sacrifices of children's happiness and children's lives... These conditions, if not all consciously present to Dickens' mind as he sorrowed over the death of Little Nell, were part of his background of thought and feeling... Through them Nell is transformed from a single suffering child into a symbol for all the victims of a society that might discover...

that it had killed its children..." (32). He is caught in a trap of his own ingenuity now, for saying that Nell is a symbol, he has to explain all the other characters' symbolism, Quilp "heartless cupidity" and Brass "dirty crawling dishonesty... that will twist itself and every instrument of law to the service of chicanery..." (33) but what of Grandfather? and Dick? and Kit? and the Garlands?? Later he says that the notes of sympathy for the oppressed and the dark warnings of doom are "subordinated to the grotesque comedy and lyric pathos". What then is the book supposed to be about? Professor Johnson, though profuse, is not really resolved. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson seem sure the book is an allegory, but do not attempt to unravel the allegorical meaning (34). Stephen Spender believed he was defending this novel as an aesthetic totality by proving that such good girls as Nell really did exist (35).

Henry Miller found the sentimentalism of Nell, Smike, Paul and their brethren reasonably harmless "rose-water vapourings" (36). Professor G.H. Ford rightly points out that from Cordelia to harmless "rose-water vapourings" is the history of Nell's progress in a hundred years (37). There are so many unanswered questions in the strange case of Nell and her grandfather. Why did she move readers so deeply in the 1840's and leave them cold a century later? Post-Freudian psychology may explain (the italics are important here, the subjunctive mood is the correct one) Dickens' obsession with Nell. There seems to be a lot of evidence to support the great Mary/Fanny theory. "I solemnly believe that so perfect a creature never breathed"

the stricken author said of poor Mary (38). "I cannot bear the thought of her being excluded from her dust" he wrote, and hoped to be buried next to her (39). Her death "for some time completely bore him down. His grief and suffering were intense, and affected him...through many after years," Forster recorded (40). His love and attachment to Mary would never diminish he claimed (41). On 25th October 1842, three years after her death, he wrote to Forster "The desire to be buried next to her is as strong upon me now as it was five years ago; and I know (for I don't think there ever was love like that I bear her) that it will never diminish..." (42). At Niagara Falls he thinks of her "what would I give if the dear girl whose ashes lie at Kensal Green had lived to come so far along with us - but she has been here many times...since her sweet face faded from my earthly sight." (43) Even by 1844 he is still dreaming of Mary. "...I recognised the voice...I knew it was poor Mary's spirit. I was not at all afraid, but in a great delight, so that I wept very much, and stretching out my arms to it called it 'Dear'..." (44) In 1848 he writes "This day eleven years, poor dear Mary died." (45) Part of the case of the great theorists of the Mary/Fanny school is that Dickens dreamed of Mary for years after her death, and that these dreams did not cease until Charles Dickens told his wife about them. But the facts are that the dreams did not stop. "With longer or shorter intervals this was with him all his days. Never from his waking thoughts was the recollection altogether absent; and though the dream would leave him for a time, it unfailingly came back...in the very year before he died, the influence was potently upon him. 'She is so much in my thoughts at all times...that the

Catherine Dickens, her sister Georgina Hogarth, and
Charles Dickens (1842).

Drawing by Maclise.
Victoria and Albert Museum.



recollection of her is an essential part of my being, and is as inseparable from my existence as the beating of my heart is.' Through later troubled years...whatever was worthiest in him found in this an ark of safety..." Here we have the testimony of the biographer who was, after all, in a position of proximity to Dickens not shared by Edmund Wilson, Warrington Winters, Jack Lindsay or Mark Spilka. (46)

This evidence, though I believe we should be reluctant to base a case of incestuous child-wife fixation upon the facts as we have them (47) does indicate that Dickens had very strong feelings for Mary and that her tragic death moved him deeply. This may justify the suggestion that Dickens wrote Nell as some sort of celebration of all the virtues he saw in Mary: it would explain Dickens' obsession with Nell, but it would not explain the public's obsession with Nell. I think this is a very significant, and very neglected aspect of the problem of Little Nell. Why did so many readers respond so readily to Nell and her sad story? Let us not be superior in our century (48), for the obsession with Nell continues, the industry of Messrs. Wilson, Lindsay, Spilka, Pearson, Winters, is evidence for that. Why was Nell interesting? Why is she still interesting?

It is not really enough to say that Dickens was writing in an age of "sensibility" when people - men and women - readily shed tears (49). Sensibility had become a sacred word, they had a quality not found among the ancients, they had "sensibility". "The heroic and tremendous virtues might be dying out,"

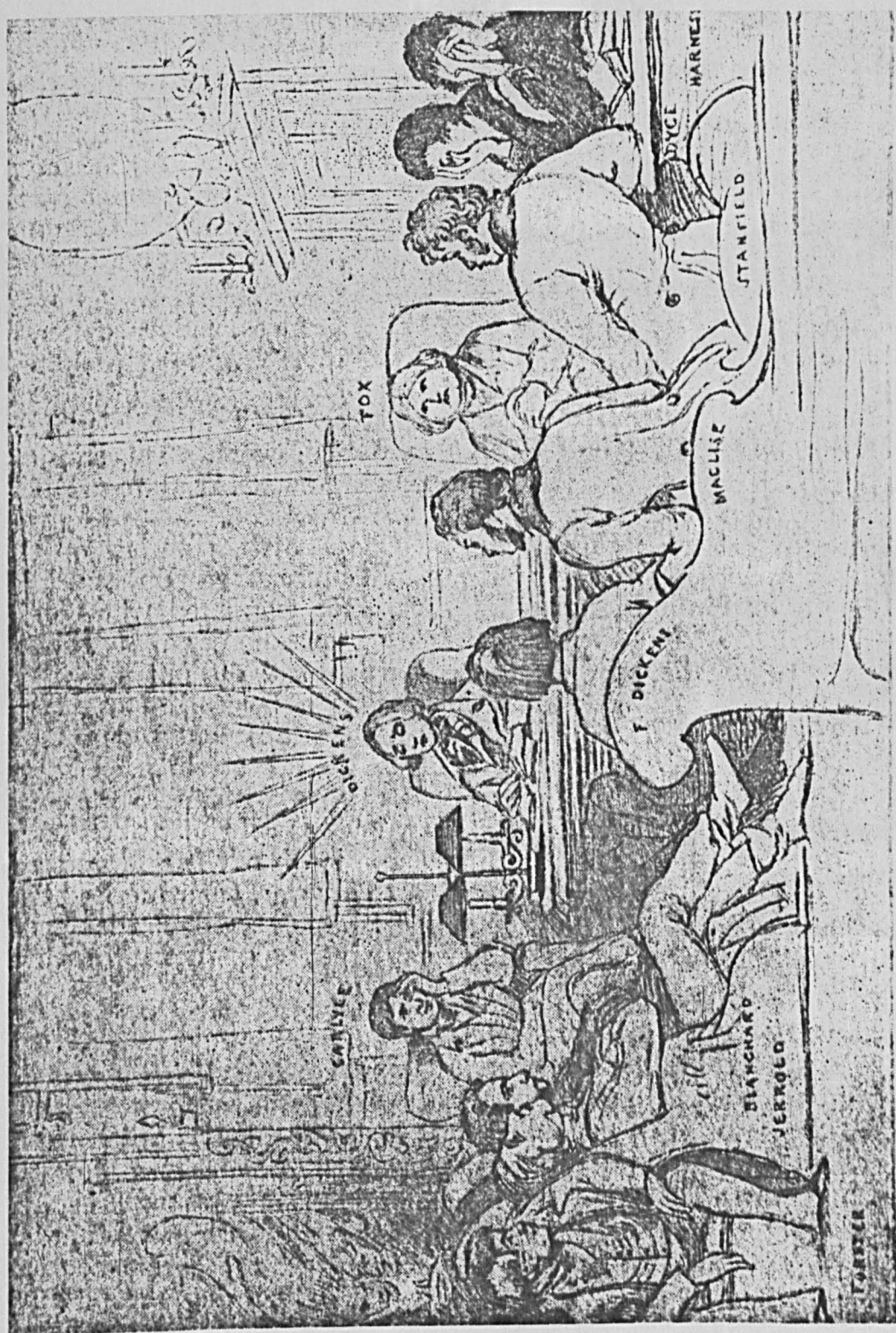
Tompkins writes, "...but modern society, leisure and education had evolved a delicacy of sensation, a refinement of virtue, which the age found even more beautiful." (50) The most surprising people easily shed tears (51). Florence Dombey made Macaulay cry as if his heart would break (52). The Iron Chancellor himself sobbed with very little provocation (53). The company which assembled to hear Dickens give a first reading of The Chimes in 1844, and included Maclise, Carlyle, Fox, Barham, Jerrold, and no women, wept when they heard the master deliver his new tale (54). Hans Anderson was a noted public weeper (55). Reading the death scene of little Paul Dombey at so notoriously chill-hearted a place as Edinburgh ("there was a certain coldness about the audiences there" Dickens had been told,) he blew the audience up with its pathos, and it is claimed that this reading never failed to move people to tears (56). "The elision in the pathetic parts (of A Christmas Carol) was ruthless, though a few of the poignant parts were left in the life and death of Tiny Tim. The visit of Bob to the death bed was cut out, but Dickens got all the greater effect from the Mother's words over her mourning needlework, and over the Father's promise to visit the grave. 'He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it...' ". (57) For eye-witness accounts of the effects Dickens achieved when giving public readings we have the record of George Dolby, who was Dickens' manager: Dickens' effects were immense and profound (58). Lady Blessington wept over The Chimes simply in reading it to herself at home (59). "I have never seen men go in to cry so undisguisedly as they did at that reading (of Dombey and Son)" Dickens wrote (60). A modern argument for the success of pathetic and sentimental episodes then and their failure nowadays, is that Dickens lived

Charles Dickens reading The Chimes at Lincoln's Inn Fields, Monday the 2nd of December 1844.

From left to right: John Forster, Douglas Jerrold, Laman Blanchard, Thomas Carlyle, Dickens, Frederick Dickens (the novelist's brother), Daniel Maclise, William Johnson Fox, Clarkson Stanfield, Alexander Dyce, and the Revd. William Harness.

"...in the grave attention of Carlyle, the eager interest of Stanfield and Maclise, the keen look of poor Laman Blanchard, Fox's rapt solemnity, Jerrold's skyward gaze, and the tears of Harness and Dyce, the characteristic points of the scene are sufficiently rendered..."

Forster: Life of Dickens Book IV Chapter vi.



and wrote in a sentimental age, and ours is not. Professor Johnson has argued that The Old Curiosity Shop is in the central stream of natural emotion in literature, and we of the twentieth century are outside it, and that is why we find it hard to stomach the death of Little Nell. He quotes Homer's heroes weeping, Dante's swooning under the pain of Beatrice's displeasure, the emotionalism of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, Shakespeare's Imogen and Hermione, Caroline playwrights and the drunken maudlin Squire Western to support his claim that "It is in fact not we, but Dickens and the Victorians who are in the central stream of natural emotion." (61) It is debatable whether there is a recognisable mainstream of emotionalism in literature. Wordsworth, for example, obviously thought things were getting worse, when he felt constrained to say that "the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this...a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and...to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor... To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers...are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories..." (62). Some sixty years later Walter Bagehot complained that English literature had become "a dressy literature, an exaggerated literature," (63) and in fact nearly all the weightier Victorian critics lamented the meritricious element which they believed was so marked a feature of their literature. Writing of Homer,

Newman said that his poems were "free, manly, simple, perspicuous, energetic, and varied. It is the style of one who rhapsodized without deference to hearer or judge, in an age prior to the temptations which more or less prevailed over succeeding writers - before the theatre had degraded poetry into an exhibition..." (64). So we see that the more perceptive of critics were well aware that there was an endeavour in literature to have a palpable design on our emotions, to sentimentalise, to exaggerate and to shock; by this token we should accept Ruskin's dictum that Nell was butchered for the market. It is not as simple as that. Dickens' age was a sentimental one, ours is not. (65)

We could take Frederick A. Pottle's theory of relativist criticism; that there is no golden, eternal absolute standard, no final court of literary appeal. He suggests that works are relative to their age, and therefore to compare Little Nell with Cornielle, Shakespeare or Arthur Miller is critical nonsense. Part of the whole problem of this novel is the temptation to consider Little Nell on her own, in a vacuity, isolated from the novel of which she is so essential a part. Most of the critical problems discussed above, and the incoherence they generate, is the result of looking only at Nell, and not only at Nell, but dwelling on her death. Raymond Williams is right to insist that the only way to embark on criticism of Dickens' novels is to try and see the complete literary artifact as a cohesive, cogent totality, not to shove the novel into some frame or to illustrate social theory. "It is more important," he says, "even where we think he is limited or wrong, to see

the actual dramatisation of values than to frame a system with limits. The dramatisation, after all, is where it happened, and where it was lived." (66). He goes on convincingly to argue that we must take a novel as the author leaves it, as a work of art, imagined, stimulated, conceived and produced - all other considerations except those of the novel itself are monstrously irrelevant. What he has to say in this respect is relevant to the strange case of The Old Curiosity Shop, which has for over a century been a happy hunting ground for theorists, critics and psychological amateurs with time on their hands. "To talk of anachronism, or retrospective social criticism is to evade what is actually brought to life: a vision of society... To take any element out of this whole view, and treat it as a problem on its own, is at once to devalue it... And it is no less, because it is this, an action in early Victorian England. This is the creative reality underlying the easy description of Dickens creating a world. The action dramatises the experience of a society, not its isolable facts." (67). I believe that when we try to consider this novel as a whole, and not allow our attention to wander away on to the less profitable byways of neuro-psychoanalysis, and try to understand how the various parts work together and contribute to the total effect of the whole, we shall come to see what kind of experience of a society Dickens was attempting to dramatise, and at the same time come a little nearer the solution of the puzzling attraction of Little Nell. It is only when we succeed in understanding the novel as a total work of art, and not to try to talk away its awkwardnesses by sweeping Nell and Trent under the carpet, that we are allowing ourselves fully to respond to what the novelist created;

the kind of pleading by the Earl of Wicklow, who finds "the terribly good little girl and her asinine old grandfather" completely unworthy, is less than just to Dickens. It is the old line of least resistance, the good characters are mawkish, the villains and the background superb. Nell, Trent, and Kit are as much part of the novel as Quilp, Brass and Dick. We must try and see the whole world of this novel, and not be satisfied with a guided tour of selected attractions.

(ii)

The most sensible starting point would be to consider the state of the society Dickens saw about him, and read about in the newspapers, when he created the story of Nell and her grandfather. I do not see why the overtly "Gothicke" features of the imaginative world of The Old Curiosity Shop, should "effectively disable any social actuality." (68). Nor do I accept that the bands of unemployed, maddened men armed with sword and firebrand remain "a background to Nell's very personal suffering" and that although Dickens apparently wanted to force a connection, he failed to do so (69). George Gissing seems to have accepted the actuality of the story and its setting. "One day in the City, I found myself at the entrance to Bevis Marks! I had just been making an application in reply to some advertisement - of course, fruitlessly; but what was that disappointment compared with the discovery of Bevis Marks? Here dwelt Mr. Brass and Sally, and the Marchioness..." (70). What sort of society did the young Dickens see around him? The period of the publication of Nicholas Nickleby, the composition and serial appearance of The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge was one of considerable economic depression, with all the accompanying

hardships of factory closures, short-time and immense unemployment. This was the economic hardship which so many historians have attributed to the basis of Chartism. (71) It finds its reflection in the novels of Dickens. The public turbulence which is so strong an element of Barnaby Rudge so obviously reminds one of the Chartist riots, and the dreadful social and industrial conditions through which Nell and her grandfather pass will stand as a valid portrait of England in the years 1840-1842. One of the most vivid eye-witnesses we have is Sir Charles James Napier (1782-1853) who had been made Major General in 1837 after distinguished service at home and abroad. In 1839 he was appointed to command the northern districts in England during the threat of Chartist disturbances. "There is among the manufacturing poor, a stern look of discontent," he says, "of hatred to all who are rich, a total abstinence of merry faces;...sallow tinge and dirty skins tell of suffering and brooding over change. Yet often have I talked with scowling visaged fellows, and the ruffian look passes from their faces, making them smile at their ease: this tells me that their looks of sad and deep thought are not natural... Poor fellows..." (72). This is very similar to the picture of the aggrieved operatives and working people we find in The Old Curiosity Shop: "strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures; clanking their chains... Men, women, children, wan in their looks and ragged in their attire, tended the engines... begged upon the road, or scowled half-naked from the doorless houses...night, when the smoke was changed to fire...when bands of unemployed labourers paraded in the roads...when some called for bread, and some for drink to drown their cares; and some

Rioters seen at night in The Old Curiosity Shop.

"The melancholy fact remains, that this thing known at present by the name of Chartism does exist; has existed; and either 'put down', into secret treason, with rusty pistols, vitriol-bottle and match-box, or openly brandishing pike and torch... is like to exist till quite other methods have been tried with it. What means this bitter discontent of the Working Classes? Whence comes it? Whither goes it?"
Carlyle: Chartism (1839) Chapter 1.



with tears, and some with staggering feet...went brooding home..." (73).

The period 1833-1842 is one of short term fluctuations, with peaks of business activity in 1836 and 1839-1840 (74). Although some economic historians see the years 1838-1842 as totally depressive years, (75) there had been a boom in trade in 1825, which in turn was followed by a financial crisis. There were then seven years of dull trade figures, although in 1828 and the first part of 1831 there were signs of a revival in trade. The signs quickened and this strong upward trend brought a boom in 1836. This was a year of speculative mania. The President of the Board of Trade, J. Poulett Thomson, in a speech in the House of Commons in May 1836 said that it was impossible not to be struck with the spirit of speculation which then existed in the country. "I felt it my duty," he said, "to direct a register to be kept...of the different joint stock companies and the nominal capital it was proposed to embark in them. The nominal capital to be raised by subscription amounts to £200,000,000 and the number of companies is between 300 and 400. I am just now reminded of the speculation for making beet sugar, but that is a sound speculation compared with some on my list. The first is the British Agricultural Loan Company, with a capital of £2,000,000... Another is proposed for supplying pure spring water, capital £30,000... The Safety Cabriolet Company, capital £100,000; the British and American Intercourse Company, capital £2,000,000... I fear that the place I represent (Manchester) can furnish instances of schemes...that can never be beneficial to anyone. The fact

is, the greater part of these companies are got up by speculators for the purpose of selling their shares. They bring up their shares to a premium, and then sell them, leaving the unfortunate purchasers...to shift for themselves..." (76).

Ralph Nickleby springs quite naturally to mind. The damaging economic effect of this speculative mania was to frighten the investors, hence the succeeding period of gloom between 1838 and 1842. The Select Committee on Joint Stock Companies, reporting in 1844, found that there were three basic kinds of company: (a) bona fide companies, which were commercially foolish, (b) bona fide companies which were badly managed, and therefore open to twisters and frauds, (c) totally fraudulent companies, of the United Metropolitan Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking variety. Company law was at this time undeveloped (77).

The latter half of 1836 brought a slight fall in prices, and a decline in the activities of the more speculative side of the boom. In the following year a banking panic in the United States brought a sharp recession in Great Britain (78). The recovery of 1838 was slight and did not affect all trades. In 1839 some trades were in good shape, others showing unhealthy signs. It was a year of high food prices and corn imports, there was an alarming drain of gold from the Bank of England. 1840 was quiescent, business was staid but unprofitable, high production was maintained, and this played a large part in moving the period from recession into depression, which by 1842 could truly be described as deep depression. Chartism, the major public manifestation of popular discontent in this period, had the peculiar ability to absorb into itself all manner of

discontents - Anti Corn Law agitation, repeal of the New Poor Laws, Currency Reform, persecution of various sections of the working population (trade unionists, the case of the Glasgow cotton spinners, etc.) as well as the genuine political grievances at the deep inadequacy of the 1832 Parliamentary Reform Act - thus amalgamated, this general anti social force became dangerous.

The nation was passing through a period of deep and fundamental economic change. The industrialisation of Britain reached the period of its greatest momentum between the years 1825 and 1850. The rate of growth of industrial production between 1818 and 1855 increased by more than 30% per annum, more rapidly than ever before, or since (between 1700 and 1780 it was less than 2% and in the years 1876 and 1913 it was again less than 2%). (79). This was chiefly the result of the introduction on an unprecedented scale of mechanical means of production; the power loom revolutionised by the mechanical devices of Heilman in Germany and Donisthorpe and Lister in England. The building of railways brought immeasurable developments in metallurgy and mining - this was to bring about the mushrooming of the Scottish iron industry, which benefitted now from the perfection of Neilson's hot air blast system of 1825. The iron industry in South Wales between 1830 and 1847 increased its output by 150% (80). The coal industry expanded throughout the period here under discussion. The extension of railway communications brought thousands to the towns: between 1821 and 1831 towns of upward 20,000 inhabitants grew by 1,000,000 and in the decade 1831-1841 by 1,270,000; between 1841 and 1851

they expanded by 1,800,000 (81). West country clothing towns diminished, while middle sized towns, ports and iron centres, and London all expanded.

Although in general terms it could be argued that the actual living standards of the working classes rose in the first half of the nineteenth century, this apparent improvement was certainly offset by war and unwise government policy. The legacy of the eighteenth century was bad conditions in housing and employment, long hours, irregular employment, harsh payment. The years 1790 to 1850 do show that an increased number of the workers came to benefit from the factory expansion which aided production, the improvement was not continuous, and the periods of trade depression and stagnation of wages are true signs of hardship. The main causes of this hardship were threefold. Most historians would agree (82) that the main economic features of the period were the inability of British agriculture to cope with the needs of the population, the restrictions imposed by the government, the infamous Corn Laws which restricted the import of supplies, and the fact that after the early 1830's investment expenditure was directed towards the purchase of United States securities, and the financing of export goods and industries, so this was of little immediate help to the domestic consumer. To this must be added the melancholy fact that the years 1838-39 and 1847 were years of very bad harvests. (83).

Most sections of the working population were affected by fluctuating wages and prices, the sharp recession in the export

trades in 1837 was followed by adverse trade figures in all branches of industry. The balance of payments crisis in 1838 brought raised interest rates. 1842 was a year of deep depression. The following year signs of recovery were visible, but not to any stimulating level of activity. In the mid 1830's there had been a boom of railway speculation, much of it spurious. In Keynes' phrase, what actual construction did emerge, emerged only "as a by-product of the activities of the casino." (84). It came to mania pitch in 1836-37 and declined into a trough of depression in 1841-2. The only exception to this general rule was Mr. Midas, George Hudson, who at this period of decline in railway investment was in fact pushing on with his northern section of line which would link London and Edinburgh (85). Up to this period of slackening interest in railways, the expansion of the system had been immense. In 1833 there had been less than 200 miles in operation, but by 1842 there were 2,000 miles. In 1838-1840 there was more spent on the railways than the total value of our exports to the United States (86). The mania of the next decade added 4,500 miles of track to the national system (87).

The cotton industry was one which greatly depended on the import of raw material. 1837 had been a bad year for the trade, the period 1840-1841 saw a great rise in the figures of imported raw cotton, to over 400 million tons (88). Employment was steady, production rose, but the value of the output fluctuated. There was considerable loss of capital in the industry (89). Prices were particularly affected by competition from recently erected mills. The collapse of prices hit merchants

hard, as well as other areas of employment - for example handloom weavers making fancy goods for the United States markets. The cost of the overheads in the cotton industry were such that mill owners tried as much as possible to maintain full production all the time, the loss of foreign markets meant that owners then had to recourse to the home market. In 1839 output fell, and high stocks carried over from 1838 depressed the market (90). Short time was introduced. 1840 saw the reaction, exports remained at the same level, but the home market starved for twelve months. By the following year, dull trade led to depression, and 1841 and 1842 are the only instances of consumption of raw cotton falling for two years in succession between 1815 and the cotton famine during the American Civil War. The Spring of 1841 saw a notable falling off, exports were poor and home market worse. Manufacturers "dumped" stocks abroad to keep trade up (91). The banks could not help to tide manufacturers over a bad patch, as the joint stock banks in Lancashire were dependent on local prosperity. Firms closed, manufacturers went bankrupt (92). In Lancashire 131 mills were idle in the period October to December 1841, with machinery of 3,303 horse power idle; 129 mills were on short time employing 2,000 less men than during normal working; 844 mills were open and working full time, but with a total horse power of 29,531, 2,617 of which was idle, and by the end of 1841 they were employing 10,000 less men. Stockport was particularly badly hit, as it was an old established centre of the industry and there it was not easy to adapt to new methods (93). A similar pattern of depression can be traced in the woollen and worsted industries in the same period, 1837-1842 (94). These industries were very

badly affected in the slump (95). By 1842 there are clear signs that this industry is recovering.

Even coal, which seemed a stable industry, went through a shaky period at this time. There was heavy demand on the coalfields of northern England, Lancashire, Midlands and South Wales, (96) as it served so many other industries. Coal was shipped to London by sea, but the industry expanded because of the increased shipment of coal by the railways; output reached a peak in 1841, there was then a sharp fall in prices. The chaos in the industry was well reflected in the massive strike of miners in 1844 so vividly described by Engels (97). 40,000 miners went on strike and every mine in the country stood idle. The strike was one of considerable solidarity and lasted four months. The owners of the mines were eventually reduced to giving the miners notice to quit their cottages, and the sick, the feeble, old men and little children, even women in the pangs of childbirth were turned out into the roads and ditches in July of that year (98). Lord Londonderry, one of the richest of the mine owners, forbade traders in Durham to give the wretched miners and their families any goods on credit, and thus hoped to starve them into submission. Still they held, living on moors, in ditches and in ruined property. Eventually the strike was broken by the importing of cheap labour from Ireland and the remote parts of Wales. The strike had lasted nineteen weeks (99). The stability of the industry, despite its central place in the nation's economy, was really tenuous.

Up to 1835 iron had been less prosperous than the other

industries. There had been a long tradition of low prices, over production, high unemployment; but the year 1835-1836 saw a boom, high prices, lower unemployment and high production. The new blast furnaces using the principles of Neilson made the Scottish iron industry prosper at a level not reached in England until 1840, as the hot air blast system favoured the black-band ironstone deposits of Scotland and the technical qualities of local Scottish fuel. Iron was needed for railways, tools and domestic equipment and consequently the fortunes of the industry were tied to the ups and downs of railway production. This was at a peak in 1840 but the iron trade was depressed; competition drove out the high cost producers in Staffordshire, which had been an old centre of the iron industry. After 1840 the demand in the railway industry fell, and consequently the iron industry suffered; exports were increased in an attempt to find an outlet for production, but iron prices continued to fall until 1845, the year of the second great railway boom (100). In 1842 the cutlery trade suffered its worst depression in the nineteenth century (101).

As a background to the Chartist agitation then we have a dismal industrial situation, in which every branch of trade and production suffers acute depression, (102) trade reports were poor, unemployment high, and therefore the chances of civil disturbance were consequently very high (103). The actual unemployment figures for the main areas affected tell their own dismal story: during the month of July 1842 in Stockport 50% were unemployed, in Greenock 60%, in Huddersfield 33%, in Birmingham out of a total population of 99,000 recorded in the

1841 census, 20,000 were unemployed, and in Newcastle-on-Tyne 12,000 out of a total population of 29,000 (104). Such was the England which Dickens would have read about in the newspapers as he wrote Barnaby Rudge, such was the England through which Nell and Grandfather Trent make their progress. As Carlyle observed, Chartism was a new name for an old disease (105) and condition which he ascribes to the state of affairs where prices and wages are "incalculable, more or less of the nature of gambling." (106). It is not without relevance that several economic historians have commented on the casino basis of speculative economy (107). Dickens shows old Trent ruined by the gambler's urge, and in the process destroying his dear child (108).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DIVINITY OF NELL

"This dream is too real. I cannot sleep, I cannot stay here, I cannot leave you alone under the roof where such dreams come. Up! We must fly." He looked at her as if she were a spirit - she might have been, for all the look of earth she had.....

The Old Curiosity Shop, Chapter 42.

"He who offers to me with devotion only a leaf, or a flower or a fruit, or even a little water, this I accept from that yearning soul, because with a pure heart it was offered with love."

Bhagavad Gita ix:26 translated by Juan Mascar.

(i)

Of a later variant of the child heroine, Little Dorrit, Kathleen Tillotson wrote that she repeated, more subtly, a leading idea of *Oliver Twist* and *Little Nell*, "the strength and indestructibility of natural, innocent virtue. As with *Oliver* and *Nell*, her goodness, with such upbringing, may be thought implausible; but it must be seen as expressing what still survived of Dickens' own indestructible faith - expressing it almost allegorically, with the validity of a fairy tale..."

(1). Like the girl child in the moving mediaeval poem Pearl, *Nell* seems to be an eternal symbolic representation of goodness and purity - an "innocent" rather than a "virgin" in the mediaeval sense (2). Most modern criticism shies away from the symbolic or divine qualities of these child figures, but the effect they have is strong and sometimes deeply effective. *Nell* passes through life, as on a pilgrimage, to a better life. We should note that there is an unmistakable and direct reference to The Pilgrims Progress in chapter fifteen; *Nell* had the book at home, and wondered if it was true in every word and "where those distant countries...might be... 'Dear grandfather' she said, '...I feel as if we were both Christian, and laid down on this grass all the cares and troubles we brought with us...' " (3).

Professor Barbara Hardy will have no nonsense from *Nell* and company: "They (the sentimental heroines) are still sometimes defended on the grounds that their identity is symbolic rather than realistic and related to fairy-tale or myth rather than to the imitation of life. It is obviously - very obviously - true that they are presented in fairy-tale and fabulous terms, but this only serves to draw attention to their senti-

mentality. Genuinely resonant mythological characters, such as Cinderella, Kafka's 'K' or Beckett's tramps, make their appeal by tapping our collective awareness, and do not need to be fussed over and advertised..." (4). But I think we must look deeper than fairy story to understand the appeal of Nell. The evidence usually assembled - that the novelist was upset by the death of Mary Hogarth - will account only for its effect on Dickens himself, it does not account for the extraordinary effect of the story of Nell on Dickens' readers, now as well as then. I think the appeal of Nell is such because Dickens has created a story in a great and traditional mould, the "Divine Child" of archetypal myth. Edgar Allan Poe first indicated this line of enquiry in a review in Graham's Magazine in 1841, where he discussed the mixture of pathos and ideality (5). This, he pointedly said had never been approached "except in one instance, and that is the case of the Undine of De La Motte Fouque" (6). Poe seemed well aware, also, of the symbolic-allegoric potential of Undine (7).

Nell seems to have many features in common with a fay creature or Divine Child. Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte Fouque, who died in 1843, was a prolific author of romantic tales. Der Zuberring, Die Fahrten Thiodulfs des Islanders and all his other stories were surpassed in fame by Undine, published in 1811 (8).

Nell seems to identify most closely with the water-sprite, half of this world and half belonging to another world. Forster seems aware of this "And when, at last, Nell sits within

the quiet old church where all her wanderings end...the associations among which her life had opened seem to have come crowding on the scene again, to be present at its close. But stripped of their strangeness; deepened into solemn shapes by the suffering she has undergone; gently fusing every feeling of a life past into hopeful and familiar anticipation of a life to come;...already imperceptibly lifting her, without grief or pain, from the earth she loves, yet whose grosser paths her light steps only touched to show the track through them to heaven..." (9).

It is worth pointing also to the strong water associations of Paul Dombey, what the waves were saying, and at the moment of his death Dickens refers to "the swift river which bears us to the ocean" (10).

The Old Curiosity Shop has much of the trappings and atmosphere of gothic romance, good spirits, evil spirits, the elemental symbolic journey through life. It may be asked, how did all this come through to Dickens? It could have come generally from the recent fashions of the times, out of Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, Byron and others. It could have come directly from his association with Carlyle, who translated Fouque's Aslauga's Knight and Sintram and his Companions (11). Nell seems to have some of the important features of an "undine" figure, fay, ethereal, and of the watery element (note the snow at her death). Goethe, Scott, Coleridge all admired Undine, which seems to point to a fairly wide popular following of this tale. The English Illustrated Magazine in 1888 claimed that

in the past century no other single German tale had been more widely read and added that "not even its universal adoption as a school book has been able to injure its popularity." (12). Undine, as seems the case with the story of Nell, stems from the school of Tieck, Schlegel (August Wilhelm and his brother Friedrich) Novalis, E.T.A. Hoffman (13). Poe, who owed them all so much (14) said that he would rather the world should lose the works of Moliere than Undine. The nymph, sometimes divine, sometimes simply a spirit of the waters, persists in mythology. Nell seems to be associated with the animal world (Pan, fauns) trees and flowers (Dryad) as well as with water (Triton, naiads) (15). The natural divinities mentioned in Homer, the Muses, were called "water maidens" by Callimachus in his Hymn. Athene herself is described as a "child of the waters" (16). Daphne, the beloved of Apollo, is the daughter of the river Peneus (17). The nymph Arethusa sank into the earth and became a fountain to avoid capture by Alpheus (18). The Hindoo Vedic Hymns tell of the apsaras, the swan maidens. These are the clouds, daughters of earth and water who vanish at the approach of the sun: in Slavonic mythology there were the rusalkas, daughters of Rus, the stream: in Teutonic mythology there are the Rhinemaidens, nixies and elves the spirits of the running waters of the Elbe (19). We find these creatures in all mythologies, and their fascination persists - witness Hans Anderson's The Little Mermaid (1838). The divine child, the child god figure is also found in all mythologies (20). They seem to reach maturity almost straight away, as orphans or foundlings they are invariably subject to serious dangers (21). The child god is essentially isolated, nursed

by divinities or animals (22). The divine child is traditionally associated with animals (23).

The solitariness of the child is usually stressed. This we find in the opening chapters of The Old Curiosity Shop and we note Dickens' intentions, so well discussed by Forster: "...from the opening of the tale...from the image of Little Nell asleep amid the quaint grotesque figure of the old curiosity warehouse, to that other final sleep she takes among the grim forms and carvings of the church aisle; the main purpose seems to be always present. The characters and incidents that at first appear most foreign to it, are found to have had with it a close relation... In the first still picture of Nell's innocence in the midst of strange and alien forms we have the forecast of her after-wanderings, her patient miseries, her sad maturity of experience before its time..." (24). In many mythological treatments of the idea of the divine child the relationship with the primal element of water is stressed (25). The primordial child, according to Jung, in mythology is an "allegory of the rising sun and of all the new-born children in the world..." (26).

We should also note that Dickens directly points out the association between Nell and the sun: Chapter seventeen opens "Another bright day shining in through the small casement, and claiming fellowship with the kindred eyes of the child, awoke her..." (27). In this sense, in the idea of "beginning" - the water symbol is very important; Homer speaks of "Oceanus...the source of the gods" and "source of all things" (28): The

archetype of the child-god is thus extremely widespread, and in the true sense of the word, effective. As Jung blandly says, it is hardly necessary to refer to the still living "Christ-child" (29). It seems that here we are really discussing the figure of a puer aeternus. The eternal and mystical significance of this is confirmed by two examples - the scene at the close of Goethe's Faust Part Two in which Faust is transformed into a boy and admitted into the Chor Seliger Knaben (30) and its obvious associations with Jesus' exhortion "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven " (31). Scrooge at his moment of transformation cries out: "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy..." (32). We should note also that at the end of A Child's Dream of a Star when the child grows old and is dying he says "...My age is falling from me like a garment and I move towards the star as a child." (33).

The figure of the divine child, the spiritual guide to past, present and future is used by Dickens to a marked degree in the Christmas Books. Scrooge's first visitor is a child, a mixture of old and young; in The Chimes it is the little child Lilly who guides Trotty in his visions in multi-directional time, and who is described as "innocent and radiant" (34); in The Haunted Man the good angel is again a young girl, Millie Swidger. The divine prescence is emphasised in Tiny Tim, whose 'presence was from God" and whose grave was such a very "green place". Another, less celebrated example, of the divine child is Lucie's little son in A Tale of Two Cities,

The Apotheosis of Little Nell.

"Where is she now?" said the old man. "Tell me that."
The Old Curiosity Shop Chapter 72.



THE SPIRIT'S FLIGHT

the dying boy's hair is shown lying "in a halo on a pillow" (35) and he speaks with "a radiant smile" (36). It will not do to talk this kind of thing away, in the manner of Sylvere Monod and other sophisticates. Dickens, he believes, traded "unscrupulously on religious feeling and the maternal instinct" (37). The appeal was to something much more instinctive, much deeper - this kind of thing strikes home to males and non-believers too. In 1869 George Stott wrote that Dickens' pathos was "a complete and absolute failure. It is unnatural and unlovely..." (38). But I do not subscribe to its simple and sweeping dismissal.

Young Paul Dombey has some of the aura of a divine child also, he has an obsessive association with water and at the moment of his departure for the next world he exclaims, referring to his mother's portrait, "The light about the head is shining on me as I go." (39). And we note the child who dies in A Child's Story rose into the golden air and vanished (40).

The "other-worldly" and spiritual qualities of Nell are several times insisted upon in the novel: even in physical weakness the bright eye and "spiritual head" (41) are noted. One of the little children who has overheard talk of Nell's illness implores her not to be an angel "though the sky is bright" (42). Old Trent says at the end of the story that she used to rise early and ramble abroad: "I often tried to track the way she had gone, but her small fairy footstep left no print...to guide me..." (43). As the mourners lay down their burden "The light streamed on it through the coloured window -

a window where the boughs of trees were ever rustling in the summer, and where the birds sang sweetly all day long. With every breath of air that stirred among those branches in the sunshine, some trembling, changing light would fall upon her grave..." (44). Some recalled that she had seen and talked with angels (45). It is appropriate, given the almost Christ-like and divine qualities of Nell, that her burial should be attended by the old, infirm, crippled, the halt, the lame, the blind, the palsied - "the living dead in many shapes." (46).

Of course another source of the "divine" atmosphere of The Old Curiosity Shop is the illustrations. They are responsible for a large portion of the effect the book has on us. We do not know a great deal about Dickens' instructions to his illustrators, much of it was verbal, much of it notes and memos which have been lost, and much of it was in the form of letters - which have not survived. Hablot Browne, for example, burned all his letters (47). But we can be fairly sure, from the evidence which does survive, that the novelist was fairly specific about his instructions, which according to Forster and Kitton were exacting even beyond what is ordinary between author and illustrator (48). He did not hesitate to condemn work that, he believed, did not live up to his requirements (49). Where he makes no comment, we may assume he was satisfied with the result his artist produced. In a letter dated December 21st 1840 he wrote specific details for the illustration for the death of Nell, the emphasis must be on the peace of the scene: "I think it will be quieter and more peaceful if she is quite alone. I want it to express the most beautiful repose and

tranquility and to have something of a happy look, if death can..." (50).

In the absence of any attack by the novelist on this illustration, or the endplate showing Nell being carried to heaven supported by angels, we may assume that Dickens approved of it, and that it expresses his intentions (51). These plates do stress the divine quality of Nell. The last one shows her deification.

In some forms of the divine child archetype the figure is more like a child god, sometimes more like a child hero (or heroine), but there are some features which are common to both types: both types have a miraculous birth (52). These wunderkinder are either born of virgins, or born of an incestuous marriage or union, often between brother and sister (53). The harsh adversities which these children invariably experience in childhood - abandonment, danger, persecution, etc. - unite the hero and the divine child (54). It is in the nature of the divine child to defeat evil, the powers of darkness and yet at the same time to be particularly vulnerable to those evil powers (55). We think how vulnerable Oliver is in the hands of Sikes and Fagin, and of Nell's frailty in the evil hands of the dark Quilp - a Quilp she can never really be safe from, because though they flee to the ends of the country, he always seems simply to "appear" out of nowhere: "There was an empty niche from which some old statue had fallen...she was thinking what strange people it must have looked down upon...when there suddenly emerged from the black shade of the arch, a man...the

ugly mis-shapen Quilp!" (56). The child hero, the divine child, is associated with light, with the sun as a symbol of the conscious, the evil spirits with darkness, the moon, the sign of the unconscious. "Let there be light!" is a divine demonstration of the separation of the conscious and the unconscious. Quilp, the devil of the piece, is associated with darkness, almost the first thing Dickens tells us about him is that his eyes are black and that his complexion never looks clean or wholesome, his suit is dark, his hair is grizzled black (57). The scene of his business activities is dark, rusty, rotting (58). When he is drowned his last words are "A good, black, devil's night is this..." (59). The conquering child may bring cultural gifts - fire, metals, corn - and in other ways promote beneficial arts among men. The element of the "child-mother" is a frequent one, the finest example of this in Dickens is the little mother, Little Dorrit, and this is strongly developed in Nell too. She is associated with flowers and crops (60). The child hero or heroine plays a double role, to protect, defend and conquer, and yet the maiden's helplessness exposes her to all sorts of dangers, such as being devoured by reptiles or ritually slaughtered like a beast of sacrifice (61). Nell plays this double role, she mothers her grandfather, protects him from himself by preventing him from robbing Mrs. Jarley, and yet might be a victim of the insatiate sexuality of Quilp - who makes a proposal of marriage to her almost immediately on meeting her (62).

In his work on extending and evaluating the discoveries of Freud, Jung came empirically to conclusions very different from

his master's: he divided the unconscious mind in two clearly different aspects, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious (63). He found that our species has a strange ability to create for ourselves the same kind of images and symbols for the same kind of themes and that these images are shared in common: in myth, ritual, folklore, doctrine, the arts and in dreams and fantasies both waking and sleeping, day-dreams and fantasies - in all these, we find repetition of material and images. It is only in minor concerns, such as period, idiom, topography, stylistic fashion, that we find differences. Jung, then, seems a kind of cartographer of a new land, the land of the unconscious imagination. Anthropologists have confirmed his findings, and provided additional evidence for the apparent spontaneous recurrence of these fundamental human themes expressed in universal imaginative symbols (64). Themes that are more than merely individual or personal in interest occur all over the world, and occur figured forth in similar images; Jung claims that they have somehow crystallised from the ancestral experience of our race, they are to the mind what instinct is to the physical body (65). Jung tried to show that modern dreams confirmed his findings, as they recapitulate themes in terms of traditional "archetypal" images, in many cases where there cannot have existed a buried memory of the source (66). We should consider in this context Plato's truly seminal remark that "learning is a kind of recognition" - but does this in any way help us towards explaining the mystery of Nell? I believe it does. Dickens was doing what every great artist tries to do, to "bring the unconscious part of human nature into consciousness within society" as

Wagner said (67). Dickens responded as he did, in creating Nell, not simply on the level of his sense of bereavement at the loss of Mary (68) but also on the level of true mythology; an eternal, timeless, symbolic tale which, as Forster noted, seemed to be coming from some deeper imaginative sources rising in his mind almost uncalled (69). Mrs. Leavis has pointed out that modern readers and students of Dickens are often too sophisticated and yet too humanly ignorant fully to respond to Dickens' language and to his use of traditional literary stuff. The price of our sophistication is really the loss of a whole world of the mind and the emotions which a Victorian writer could have taken for granted (70). The Cordelia-Christ-like elements are very strongly noticeable in Nell, I think:

O, dear father!

It is thy business that I go about. (71)

(ii)

Dr. Leavis refuses to take Nell seriously. He is not alone. To suggest taking Little Nell seriously, he says "would be absurd: there is nothing there. She doesn't derive from any perception of the real; she is a contrived unreality, the function of which is to facilitate in the reader a gross and virtuous self-indulgence." (72). But in one vital and essential way, Nell is profoundly "real" - she is an example of a type Dickens knew well and several times tried to portray, the inverted parent, the child who mothers its elders. I believe that as Dickens was a sensitive and deeply intelligent man, sharply conscious of his own childhood and fully aware of the world of the child, he puts something of himself into all

his child characters. I sense it in the bewildering innocence of Barnaby, the feeling of paternal neglect in Florence Dombey, the humiliation of Pip - the Pip who later seeks emotional compensation in wealth - in the wretched, neglected child in The Haunted Man. In Nell I find that Dickens puts some of his feelings about his own childhood and parents. We know that he felt his parents had neglected him (73).

He wrote to Washington Irving that he would love to show him some of the places he knew as a child, "those delightful places and people that I used to talk about and dream of in the daytime, when a very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy..." (74). The inference is obvious, his parents neglected him. He felt very strongly the memory that his mother was all for his continuing at the blacking factory (75) and that whatever his mother and father thought about these terrible episodes, and the part they played in them, they did not afterwards allude to it: in the autobiographical fragment he gave to Forster he says: "I have no idea how long it lasted; whether for a year, or much more, or less. From that hour, until this, my father and my mother have been stricken dumb upon it. I have never heard the least allusion to it...from either of them..." (76). The bitterness of tone in this passage should be especially noticed. As Professor Arthur Adrian observes, Dickens frequently portrays inadequate parents, and that such parents he delineates as "parasitical, helpless, self-indulgent, materialistic - all symptomatic of a sick society." (77). This is certainly portrayed in Nell, the good child who "mothers" her helpless grandfather.

Charles Dickens, sent out to earn his weekly six shillings when only twelve, self-sufficient, alone in the busy world of working humanity when hardly out of childhood, sent to work in a blacking factory to subsidise a father who financially had failed; is this not very strongly in the background of Little Nell? (And, for that matter, Little Dorrit?) Of this sad period of his life, the novelist wrote: "...I (small Cain that I was, except that I had never done harm to anyone) was handed over as a lodger to a reduced old lady...in Little-college-street, Camden Town, who took children in to board (this is the original of the dreaded Mrs. Pipchin)... She had a little brother and sister under her care then; somebody's natural children...and a widow's little son. The two boys and I slept in the same room. My own exclusive breakfast, of a penny cottage loaf, and a pennyworth of milk, I provided for myself. I kept another small loaf, and a quarter of a pound of cheese, on a particular shelf...to make my supper on when I came back at night. They made a hole in the six shillings I know well; and I was out at the blacking factory all day, and had to support myself upon that money all the week... No advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no support, from anyone that I can call to mind, so help me God... Sundays, Fanny and I passed in the prison... I was so young and childish, and so little qualified...to undertake the whole charge of my own existence, that...I could not resist the stale pastry put out at half-price on trays at the confectioners' doors in Tottenham-court-road; and I often spent the money I should have kept for dinner... When I had no money, I took a turn in Covent-garden market, and stared at the pine-apples... I

know I do not exaggerate...the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life... I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I tried...not to anticipate my money, and to make it last the week through; by putting it away in a drawer... wrapped into little parcels, each parcel containing the same amount, and labelled with a different day..." (78).

I have quoted this famous passage at some length because I believe it to be one of the key passages Dickens wrote. Forster describes the great sensitiveness Dickens had about these episodes in his life in the part of his biography where he tells how, quite by chance, he mentioned to Dickens the fact that he had heard as a child he worked in a warehouse near the Strand (79). He showed Forster straight away that a very tender spot had been touched upon. He brooded upon it for several days before he gave Forster the detailed account I have quoted from. It is worth looking closely at this passage: we notice that he describes himself as the quintessential outcast (80). We also note his insistence on his innocence (he had never harmed anyone) - he was placed in poor lodging with orphans, bastards - he details the scant food - he underlines his serious attempts to make his money last - he stresses his solitariness (the series of negatives should be noted, no advice, no counsel, no encouragement etc., this is really a serious indictment of his parents) - his having to rely on stale pastries - the yearning after pineapples he could never hope to afford - his poverty - the common company he worked in - the gallant attempts he made to budget his meagre funds so that

they would last the week. He sees himself as a tiny adult, misused by his parents, but somehow struggling through. None of this really matters to anyone except to the unfortunate person to whom it all happened; our only concern is how the novelist used these experiences in his fiction, and thereby makes these happenings mean something to those who respond to his art (81).

We have here, I think, an example of what makes these child figures in Dickens so effective. It is that they are double symbols: they seem to stand at once for the child in the family (neglected and abused and yet mothering inadequate parents) and at the same time to stand for the abused, overworked, cruelly used human beings who by their labour support an ill-balanced and corrupt social order. Nell looks after her helpless but crafty old grandfather. We cannot help but be reminded of John Dickens, spendthrift, irresponsible, plausible - who would resort to anything to get money out of people, and never hesitated to use his son's name once Dickens became successful (82). Another vital piece of evidence is his comment to the solicitor Thomas Mitton about his father's debts and pleadings for money, "How long he is growing up." (83). At the beginning of his career, Dickens was irritated by the drifting, micawberish way of life his father had, he went from job to job always pursued by unpaid tradesmen. He described his father's ways at this time as "the damnable shadow" cast over his life (84). No sooner was Pickwick an assured success, John Dickens was badgering his son's publishers, Chapman and Hall, to lend him £4 to "tide him over" (85). In February

1837 he wrote to Chapman and Hall to say he was again in difficulties and could they deduct what he owed them, plus interest, from the enclosed promissory note for £20? he added that he felt they might oblige him "recollecting how much your interests are bound up with those of my son..." (86). By July the same year he was in debt to these publishers to the total of £55 5s. (87).but wrote to them again to ask for an additional loan of £50 (88). "I am sure it will reflect no disgrace on you that you have to this extent assisted the father of one with whom it has been your lot to do business..." (89). In the end Dickens had to make it publically clear that he could not be held responsible for his father's debts, and inserted a notice in the press in March 1841 to that effect (90). But by 1844 he was again writing to Mitton that his father's debts were still pressing (91).

This sponging behaviour of his father's obviously lurks behind such creations as Mr. Turveydrop, Harold Skimpole and Mr. Dorritt. It is intensely present in his portrayal of Nell. Master Humphrey notices this parental quality in Nell right from the beginning. When he meets the child out late at night she asks the way to a certain street. He offers to take her there, and she puts her hand in his "as confidently as if she had known me from her cradle...and rather seeming to lead and take care of me than I to be protecting her..." (92). When he has taken her home he notices that it is Nell who gets the supper ready, "everything was done by the child" (93) and old Trent tells him that "there were few grown persons as trustworthy or as careful as she." (94). We should notice, also,

the way that the novelist stresses Nell's loneliness; as Master Humphrey leaves the shop he asks old Trent: "has she nobody to care for her but you? Has she no other companion or adviser?" (95). A few lines later Dickens spells out his point letter by letter, as Grandfather explains that he has no right to feel hurt at this question, "It is true that in many respects I am the child, and she the grown person - that you have seen already..." (96). Later in the tale, as Quilp's hold upon them tightens and Trent believes they may face beggary, the child seeks to console him by saying: "Let us be beggars, and be happy...I am not a child in what I think..." (97). When Grandfather Trent is stricken by worry about his debts and goes through a period of mental strain, Dickens refers to his behaviour as "childish" (98). When they run away from the shop, it is the child who allows him to sleep on in the morning while she gets everything ready. As they leave it is the child who takes him by the hand (99). She is the one who instinctively knows the way to go: "The old man looked, irresolutely and helplessly, first at her, then to right and left... It was plain that she was henceforth his guide and leader..." (100). Like a comforting mother, she sits at his bedside at the inn until he goes to sleep (101). Nell is terrified of being parted from him because she knows how helpless he would be without her (102). Mrs. Jarley does not hesitate to use Nell to attract business to her waxworks (103), an example of the commercial world exploiting youth to make money.

It is at this stage in the story that Dickens really pushes home the point that Trent is the child, Nell the parent: he

shows grandfather listless, with no sign of improvement, like a child he is patient, willing, "happy to execute any little task and glad to be of use" (104) and later he is described as "a mere child - a poor, thoughtless, vacant creature - a harmless fond old man..." (105). Again we note it is the child who has to steer the old man away from the sore temptation to play cards for money at the Valiant Soldier (106). Even when he has robbed her in order to continue gambling, like an indulgent mother she says "God bless him!... He has only me to help him..." (107). After some rebellious words in defence of what he does, by degrees he settled down into his usual quiet way "and suffered her to lead him where she would." (108).

When they are with Mrs. Jarley's waxworks, Trent disappears at night, obviously to gamble. Nell sits up like a dutiful parent awaiting a wayward child: "Worn out as she was, and fatigued in mind and body, she sat up alone, counting the minutes, until he returned..." (109). Her fear that he will rob Mrs. Jarley compels her to give him all the money she has, so that child-like he may indulge his weakness (110). When he is being bullied by the card sharpers, Dickens refers to him as a feeble, irresolute and "grey-haired child." (111). It is Nell who finally saves him from robbing Mrs. Jarley by making him run away, but she has to take him by the hand, like a child (112). She is quite aware that "her grandfather's preservation must depend solely upon her firmness, unaided by one word of advice or any helping hand..." (113).

It is really at this point in the novel that Nell fully

realises that their roles have been inverted: "While he, subdued and abashed, seemed to crouch before her, and to shrink and cower down as if in the presence of some superior creature, the child herself was sensible of a new feeling within her, which elevated her nature, and inspired her with an energy and confidence she had never known. There was no divided responsibility now; the whole burden of two lives had fallen upon her..." (114). When he goes to sleep in the open after their flight, Nell stays awake like a watching mother (115). The strain of these cares, and lack of nourishment, soon tell. She collapses in the road. The poor schoolmaster tells old Trent that he has "taxed her powers too far." (116). It is the same shrewd scholar who points out that Nell's suffering is but the symptom of a general suffering of children: "... the world is full of such heroism," he says, "Have I yet to learn that the hardest and best-borne trials are those which are never chronicled in any earthly record and are suffered every day! And should I be surprised to hear the story of this poor child!" (117). It is the motherly Nell who helps the schoolmaster set up house in his new post. (118).

The next chapter opens with Nell discharging "her household tasks" and we should note that throughout the novel Dickens insists her being a child - "child she certainly was" (119) "a pretty little girl" (120). He refers to her as "a little creature" (121). Old Trent begins to notice the declining health of Nell, and realises that she needs rest (122) and it is significant that the two devote their energies to tidying up the part of the churchyard given over to the graves of young

children: and "from that time, the old man never for a moment forgot the weakness and devotion of the child...(he) awoke to a sense of what he owed her, and what those miseries had made her..." (123). He now tries to help her as much as he can, with "those household duties which tasked her powers too heavily..." (124). As a child Dickens felt that he had been "cast away at such an age" and made to become a drudge (125) and that his parents were "quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar school, and going to Cambridge." (126). Here he gives Trent the realisation of a child's deprivation and suffering which he wished his parents had had.

Nell achieves some local fame and people come to visit this churchyard every day. She is admired by all, even by the roughest of schoolboys. She seems almost to be deified: "Some feeling was abroad which raised the child above them all." (127). On Sundays the church is crowded with humble rustics who had come to see her: "They would gather round her in the porch, before and after service; young children would cluster at her skirts; and aged men and women forsake their gossips, to give her kindly greeting. None of them, young or old, thought of passing the child without a friendly word. Many who came from three or four miles distant, brought her little presents; the humblest and rudest had good wishes to bestow..." (128). Right at the end of the novel old Trent tells Kit that Nell walked behind him so that he could not see how the stones of the road cut her feet "but yet she had my hand in hers, and seemed to lead me still." (129). Grandfather

is childish to the end (130). The end of the story shows the pathetic figure of the grandfather acting like a lost and helpless child. There is then a great deal "there" in the character of Nell: she is the result - in part - of Dickens' perception in his early maturity of certain harrowing experiences of his childhood; she is a contrived attempt at reality recollected at a remove of time. The grandfather may be said to represent the financial fecklessness of Dickens' father. In the fictional version of his experiences, the novelist was possibly aiming to make the parent suffer and feel his suffering as a kind of sublimated revenge for his parents' real-life indifference. My concern here is not so much with the novelty of Dickens using the child in a leading role in novels written for adults (131) but with the use he makes of the child figure. Dickens uses the child figure as an example of social victimisation: when these children suffer or die Dickens is passionately concerned to apportion the blame. There is no doubt as to the real cause of Nell's death. She has been hounded to death. She has been expected to carry a burden too great for her shoulders, her elders have killed her. Her death has a contemporary significance we should not lose sight of - there were no less than five reports on the state of child labour between 1831 and 1843 (132). Dickens' purpose is clear enough: to show that we are responsible for what happens to the young, and that these things happen all the time but we are usually indifferent to them. In the case of the death of Jo in Bleak House he is quite specific: "Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women... And dying thus around us, every day." (133).

Dickens was aware that the death of Nell was sadly typical of the kind of thing going on all round him; her death, he said "was the act of Heaven, as you may see any of these fine mornings when you look about you..." (134). The effect of the "pathos" on us today (135) is to blind us to the real function of Dickens' children. As Gissing remarks "Such pathos is called 'cheap'...in Dickens' day, the lives, the happiness of children were very cheap indeed, and...he had his purpose in insisting on their claims to attention." (136). The employment and the treatment of children at this time can hardly be contemplated; it is doubtful if a modern mind - so removed by time from the day to day reality of nineteenth century labour conditions - can actually "take in" even what the bare facts may tell us. I don't think we can understand or imagine what it was like (137). The Enclosure movement had made a vast labour force of dispossessed peasantry and their children available at a time when steam superseded water power and the factories moved to the coal producing areas. Despite poor travel facilities the wretched machine fodder moved to where the work was. Two hideous sets of circumstances conspired to make their exploitation and degradation inescapable: the crushing need for work because they were pauperised, and the manufacturers' need for a cheap labour force because trade was booming. From as far as Scotland and Ireland they came, begging for work. Men, their wives, their children were all employed; the usual age was between six and seven although three or four was not uncommon. In many cases parents were refused parish relief because they had children who could work. (138).

Making allowances for the formality and solemnity of the occasion, I daresay Benjamin Jowett meant what he said in his sermon at Dickens' funeral: "He whom we now mourn was the friend of mankind, a philanthropist in the true sense, the friend of youth..." (139).

(iii)

Is The Old Curiosity Shop among the few really great novels of the world? I will not go about the tedious game of arguing the toss with Jacobite and Russian claimants, but say that in this performance Dickens takes a simple form and fully exploits it to present a moral point which will never age. It has the immediacy and simplicity which is so often the hallmark of profound art (it can be read by a child) and yet also has a durable quality in which each fresh reading yields more. To risk a parallel, I think it has much the same kind of genius as a Schubert song-cycle; melodious, charming, immediately appealing with the quality of folk art - one feels one has known it for years... And yet, an examination of Die Winterreise shows subtlety, inter-relationships and profundities which betray the imagination of a master.

I can remember reading the story of Nell and her grandfather when I was about twelve, I should think. Its effect on me then was to make me cheer with the heroes, jeer at Quilp and Brass, shed a tear or two at the death of Nell. I read it again as an undergraduate and was not really sure about it all; I resisted - in my "sophistication" - all tendencies to be moved or touched by it, missed the humour of so much of the book, felt

the ending stagey and contrived but somehow was more touched, disturbed even, than I would admit. I read it again a couple of years ago, before embarking on this study and was utterly staggered by it. What impressed me then was its unity, the faultless way in which Dickens made his points, the aptness of his illustrations and metaphoric effects and the depth of responses he was able to achieve working within such a popular, even "vulgar" idiom.

The moment of The Old Curiosity Shop was a significant one, for Dickens as much as for England. It was a period of great change, confusion and violence. For Dickens it was a period of intense creative activity which he was probably never again to equal. Pickwick had made him famous, Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby had made him rich and forces not so readily accounted for now made him creative: he had said during the composition of Nicholas Nickleby in 1839 that he was alarmed lest he should "bust the boiler" (140) but the opening of the new decade found him engaged in work on Master Humphrey's Clock, Barnaby Rudge, The Old Curiosity Shop (141). As Kathleen Tillotson says, each new novel was an "adventure" (142). And as she goes on to point out he was very anxious at this stage of his career to maintain his relationship with his public and was thus urged always to be trying something in a new direction. These were remarkably fecund years for Dickens, usually brushed aside as a dull patch between the brilliance of Pickwick and the almost symphonic works of the 1850's. At this time he was reading Juvenal, Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Ruskin, and re-reading his Goldsmith, Sterne, Smollett and

Fielding; he embarked on his History of England, ran The Daily News; he planned a novel about a man imprisoned for ten or fifteen years and the changes he finds on his release, he projected the idea of reading tours, he toyed with the idea of starting a journal and an evening paper: all this activity belongs to this period as well as the appearance of the novels and the two travel books. (143).

I believe that the extension of the Nell story from a short piece as he had originally thought of it, into a full length novel is an additional sign of his creative energy at this time (144). Within a few months of its completion, he was back at work on Barnaby Rudge. (145).

In the summer of 1846 he was still buoyantly confident of his creative powers. "Invention, thank God, seems the easiest thing in the world," he wrote to Forster (146) but only a few months later in September, he wrote to Forster that he was frightened of wearing himself out: "I am sick, giddy and capriciously despondent. I have had bad nights; I am full of disquiet and anxiety..." (147). A few days later he says that although his eyes are bloodshot and he has severe headaches he is better but fears his work will now be seriously behind hand. He was no longer the man who worked on Martin Chuzzlewit and A Christmas Carol at the same time. (148). This amazingly fruitful period in Dickens' creative life had passed its zenith.

It is possible that working at such heat as this brought

out in him depths, dreams, frustrations, fears and perceptions he might personally have been unaware of. Forster specifically states the story of Nell and her grandfather came to the novelist "with less direct consciousness of design on his own part than I can remember in any other instance throughout his career..." (149). "I never had the design and purpose of a story so distinctly marked in my mind, from its commencement. All its quietness arose out of a deliberate purpose; the notion being to stamp upon it from the first, the shadow of that early death..." Dickens wrote to Thomas Latimer in the early Spring of 1841. (150).

It seems it was Forster's idea that Nell should die. Dickens wrote to him on 17th January 1841 "When I first began (on your valued suggestion) to keep my thoughts upon this ending of the tale, I resolved to try and do something which might be read by people about whom Death had been, with a softened feeling, and with consolation." (151). Forster says that Dickens came to accept the death of Nell as the natural end of the story "about half way through." (152). "I was responsible for its tragic ending," Forster writes, "He had not thought of killing her, when, about half way through, I asked him to consider whether it did not necessarily belong even to his own conception, after taking so mere a child through such a tragedy of sorrow, to lift her out of the commonplace of ordinary happy endings, so that the gentle pure little figure...should never change to the fancy. All that I meant he seized on at once, and never turned aside from it again." (153). Unfortunately Forster does not tell us when this was. C.E. Lester visited

Dickens in July 1840, and asked the novelist if Nell would find a quiet and happy home? He had just written chapters 23 and 24. He replied, "I hardly know what to do. But if you ever hear of her death in a future number...you shall say that she died as she lived." (154). On September 9th, Dickens wrote to Forster, "I have opened the second volume with Kit, and I saw this morning looking out at the sea...an affecting thing that I can do with bye and bye..." (155). He is probably referring to Kit's arrival at Nell's house, her birdcage in his hand, not knowing that "the strong heart of (the bird's) mistress was mute and motionless forever." (156).

Dickens' plans for the closing sections of this novel have survived, they are the earliest plans of his work which we have and it is likely they date from September 1840: "show - hard weather - travelling by night...cottages, people abed - lights in windows..." and these were to lead up to "the bird" (157). All these pieces of evidence seem to indicate that Dickens was fairly sure of where this story was to go, and what he wanted to do with it. I believe Raymond Chapman is right, the grosser sentimentality of The Old Curiosity Shop only thinly covers a deeper menace, (158) but I think the morbid gloom so readily associated with this novel is generated by its critics rather than the pages of the book itself. There is, for example, little evidence that Dickens was in a disturbed emotional state when he wrote this novel; (159) the letters seem to indicate that he was in a buoyant and cheerful state. George Ford claims that Dickens was upset because he had to give up his place next to Mary Hogarth's grave for her brother, George

Hogarth, but he did not die until October 1841, nine months after the book was completed. (160).

It is not without significance that we know for certain that he was thinking about Mary Hogarth only while he was writing the actual scenes of Nell's death: "Old wounds bleed afresh when I only think of the way of doing it... Dear Mary died yesterday when I think of this sad story..." (161). In fact the whole cult of death in this novel, started by Edmund Wilson and furthered by George Ford (162) has damaged the chances of our gaining a balanced view of it: Nell really stands for the life force, the pure, innocent life of nature which is opposed by the forces of darkness, the evil city dwellers Quilp and Brass. Nell and her grandfather flee to the country and leave the haunts of commercial, grasping, squeezing men.

The word "allegory" is freely bandied about in discussing this novel, I do not claim that it is possible to work out the allegorical significance of all the parts of this novel (163) where I feel Dickens must especially be praised for his skill and success in using with freshness and effectiveness traditional narrative elements in the theme of the journey as an image of the journey through life, and in the use of the figure of a child as a focal point for our sympathies, as a symbol of the hope and aspiration of the human spirit in a world which is far from perfect. (164).

Nell, Dickens states quite unequivocally, is "the Good

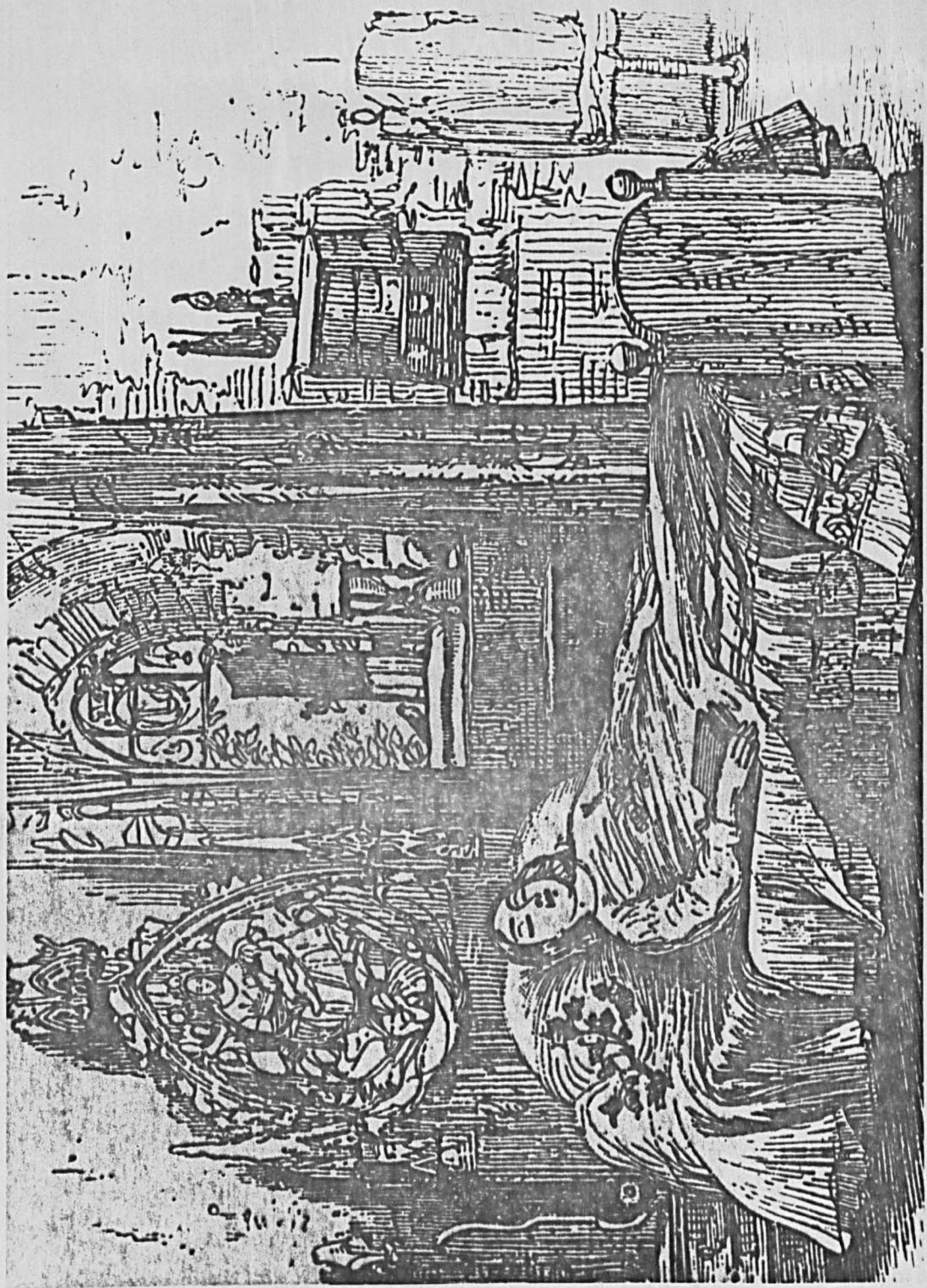
Angel of the race - abiding by them in all reverses - redeeming all their sins..." (165). When she is sleeping and almost at the gates of death, old Trent reminds Kit of her affinity with living things, she could feed the birds because although they would fly from others, they never flew from her. Now the birds made no sound so that Nell shall not be disturbed. (166). As she leaves this world Dickens stresses the essential Christian relation made between sleep, life and death. (167). Significantly her couch is dressed with winter berries and green leaves. She had said "When I die, put near me something that has loved the light, and had the sky above it always." (168). In Christian symbolism ivy typifies the everlasting life; from its remaining continually green, mistletoe is called "lignum sanctae crucis" - wood of the holy cross. (169). Holly represents the continuance of life, associated also with Saturn, the god of seed time and harvest, classic symbols of life and renewal. (170). Similar symbols accompany the appearance of the first of Scrooge's visitors, and the symbolic quality of green is stressed elsewhere in The Old Curiosity Shop, before the death of Nell. Nell in the churchyard asks a little lad whose grave a particular one was. The lad replies that it was not a grave, "it was a garden - his brother's. It was greener...than all the other gardens, and the birds loved it better because he had been used to feed them..." (171). After Nell has died, the little boy who is taking un-comprehending grandfather Trent for a walk to gather fresh leaves and berries for her bed, says that "our way is to the old green lane, where she and I so often were..." (172). The grave is later referred to as "green" - "Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on

such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven." (173). The novel affirms light, life and hope rather than the identification with death which J. Hillis Miller, Steven Marcus and others state so categorically. (174). Nell dies at the time of midwinter, the mythic season of death and re-birth associated with divine children both Christian and pagan (Perceval, Adonis, Peredur). This again affirms the faith in life which is the guiding tendency of the novel, and confirms the implication of the symbolism of birds, birdsong, flowers, air, light, which accompany Nell throughout her journey. (175).

A failure to grasp the real significance of Nell's death as being - not an end in itself, but merely the completion of one stage of life and the interim moment between mundane and divine life, leaves the novel a puzzle to which critics throw up one suggested answer after another: the death of Nell is long delayed, says Michael Steig, and "like the rape of Clarissa, it's good to have it over." (176). Leonard F. Manheim sees the action of the novel as a flight from sexuality: "Nell could never be permitted to attain an age at which the coarseness of the gross world might sully her" he says. (177). Here we reach, I think, the crux of the debate about The Old Curiosity Shop.

It is very much a question of our interpretation of the death of Nell which will affect our total understanding and

"When I die, put near me something that has loved the light,
and had the sky above it always."



evaluation of the novel. I do not think it is simply a weepie. I do not think it is a morbid book in which an indulgent and disconsolate man attempted to purge himself of the memory of his dead sister-in-law. The journey of Nell and Trent was not a pilgrimage to death. Right to the end Nell is surrounded by images of life, of light, of hope, of movement, of growth. A few lines before the description of the child on her death bed she is presented to us as "a fair flower." (178). Death in folk lore and mythology is essentially transformation. (179). That is why the presence of death in folk lore and mythology is so frequently associated with living things - the death of Siegfried who "fell among the flowers." (180). Death is often shown in traditional stories as a transformation from one kind of life to another. The Christian belief in the life of the soul is probably the most all-pervading example of this interpretation of death. But death must also be accompanied by grief, not a negative, neurotic, nihilistic grief, but grief which is a crisis the emotions must live through in order for life again to flower in us. Grief in this way is not desolation or destructive of the personality. Birds are traditionally the emblems of transformation. (181).

In this journey water frequently plays a significant part, and we think of the snow at Nell's death and Paul Dombey's associations with water. (182). Birds are present right up to the moment Nell dies. This passage, which has been so sneered at, so frequently anthologised (out of its context) as an example of "bad" writing (183) and so reviled, needs looking at

with some care. The effect Dickens is aiming at, I believe, is more subtle and more complicated than is usually taken. Nell is described as being at rest and in peace - "no sleep so beautiful and calm" (184) and she seems to be freshly created, awaiting for life to be breathed into her: "Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born".(185). Dickens points out that death has changed her into another, spiritual being, for he says "her former self lay there, unaltered in this change". (186). She is so life-like that the old man cannot believe she is dead, he believes that she is getting warmer. We are reminded again of her bird "Her little bird...was stirring nimbly in its cage..." (187) and of her associations with life, growing things, gardens and so on while she was alive: "The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life...the garden she had tended - the eyes she had gladdened - the noiseless haunts of many a thoughtless hour - the paths she had trodden..." She has been eternally transformed into what she had appeared to be in the transient world of men, a divine child: "it is not on earth that Heaven's justice ends," the schoolmaster says. (188). Her spirit has winged its way to the immortal world and none of us would wish to call her back.

The divine child has served her time on earth, has made her journey through life, has helped where she could and not spared herself: her work is done and she rejoins the eternal world. At this point Dickens re-affirms her positive and life-committed qualities. Surrounded by the traditional symbols of eternity and vitality she departs this life. It is obvious

that here, as elsewhere throughout his writings, the figure of the child means much to Dickens and I think meant a great deal to his contemporary readers. (189).

I believe there is little doubt that Dickens was profoundly moved by seeing Macready's performance of King Lear, and that the depth of his reaction is reflected by the obvious influences King Lear exerted on The Old Curiosity Shop. Old Trent, like the aged King, in trying to do all for his favourite child, destroys her. He goes mad and dies. (190). His tragedy, like Lear's, is that he puts himself in a position where other people can hurt him. The similarity between Nell and Cordelia has been noticed from the very beginning. Francis Lord Jeffrey declared there had been "nothing so good as Nell since Cordelia". (191). There are close verbal parallels, too, especially in the symbolism and imagery associated with Nell. (192). Dickens takes pains to relate Nell to all that is gentle, light, living and happy in nature. Significantly an image which is to accompany Nell throughout the book is that of the bird. Kit Nubbles achieves it for her, "Miss Nelly's bird" he calls it, (193) and later Kit refers to the natural wish of living creatures to be full of song and music: "... as natural as a sheep's bleating,...a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing..." (194). A bird seems to guide Nell on the right path: "A bird...flying into the wood, and leading the way for us to follow," she tells her grandfather. (195). "You remember that we said we would walk in woods and fields, and by the side of rivers, and how happy we would be..." (196). Nell really belongs in the innocence and freshness of the

country: "Nell was stirring early in the morning... The sky was serene and bright, the air clear, perfumed with the fresh scent of newly fallen leaves, and grateful to every sense. The neighbouring stream sparkled..." (197). Nell's innocence, like that of Barnaby, shines in its simple incorruptibility.

CHAPTER FIVE

PASTORAL CONVENTION IN "THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP"

"Vain, very vain, my weary search to find
That bliss which only centres in the mind...
Still to ourselves in every place consigned,
Our own felicity we make or find."

Goldsmith: The Traveller

I think A.E. Dyson is right to refer to the spirit of Hebrews XIII 1-4: "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity... Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have... For Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come..." (1). Even more pervasive is the spirit of Goldsmith. We do not know whether Dickens read his Pauline Epistles at this time, but we know he was re-reading his Goldsmith (2).

The influence of Goldsmith was noticeable earlier in Pickwick (3). The name "Boz" was derived from The Vicar of Wakefield (4). Goldsmith made a great impression on him as a child (5). He wrote to Angela Burdett-Coutts "I think it is not too much to say that it (The Vicar of Wakefield) has perhaps done more good in the world and instructed more kinds of people in virtue, than any other fiction ever written..." (6). Professor K.J. Fielding asserts that Dickens admired Washington Irving almost as much as he admired Goldsmith (7). We have Dickens' own words: "I don't go up-stairs to bed two nights out of seven..." he told the company at a banquet in his honour in New York, in February 1842, "without taking Washington Irving under my arm upstairs to bed with me...and when I don't take him I take his next of kin - Oliver Goldsmith." (8). The similarity with Goldsmith and other eighteenth century novelists was soon noticed. The Examiner in October 1839 said that if he did justice to his powers he would rank as a "not unworthy

successor of our Goldsmiths and Fieldings" (9). James Hannay (1827-1873) classed Dickens in the school of Sterne and Goldsmith (10). The Contemporary Review in January 1880 classed him with Goldsmith and Scott (11). Mowbray Morris writing in the Fortnightly Review in December 1882 commented on the influence "of his great fore-runners, Fielding and Smollett..." and refers to traces of Goldsmith (12). Morris shrewdly comments that it was not so much the way in which they had worked which had influenced him, as the material with which they worked. At the very time he was composing The Old Curiosity Shop, his friend John Forster was working on his Life of Oliver Goldsmith (13). They must have talked together of a writer they both so much admired (14). There are two features of The Old Curiosity Shop which show an obvious debt to Goldsmith: one is the very Augustan pastoralism noticed by so many critics (but seldom really examined) and the moral, put chiefly into the mouth of Nell, that we should be patient in adversity and content with what we have.

It has been objected that the pastoralism of early Dickens "prettifies" rather than reinforces character. Professor Barbara Hardy for example argues that one of the difficulties in speaking of Dickens' pastoral reinforcement of character "is connected with his extremely flat and banal handling of description. The pastoral point is made repeatedly... It joins to emphasize the unconditioned and unconditional nobility of the child, but does so in a stereotyping of sweetness, simplicity, and rural innocence. The effect should be a symbolic reinforcement but tends instead to be a prettifying, a reduction,

a heart-shaped frame with flowers and ivy round the dear child-face..." (15).

Professor Hardy is rightly celebrated for her clear good sense, for her rigour in persistently throwing cold water over the more steamy eccentric theorizings and psychologicalisings of those whom Dr. Leavis, with such imperious contempt, calls "the Americans" - but I feel there is a real danger that such apparent good sense may actually defeat its own aim, an understanding of the art of Dickens. It is no good simply knocking the "pastoral" in The Old Curiosity Shop: we must take it as part of the whole and attempt to see what Dickens was trying to achieve (16). I think Dickens' main concern is to show the corruption of man's innocence by "civilization". In developing this theme he uses the pastoral convention: both city and country are presented as conventions - pastoral is in its very nature selective, and I believe that Dickens' treatment of the city is equally conventionalised. This is, of course, not a new theme in Dickens' work. It is fairly well presented in Oliver Twist. Oliver's convalescence is spent in the country, which Dickens describes as giving pleasure, delight, peace of mind and soft tranquility "in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village..." (17). Here Dickens makes his point quite explicitly: "It was a lovely spot to which they repaired. Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds...seemed to enter on a new existence there. The rose and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls; the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees. Hard by, was a little churchyard; not crowded with tall unsightly gravestones, but

full of humble mounds, covered with fresh turf and moss: beneath which, the old people of the village lay at rest..." (18). The echoes of Goldsmith are unmistakable (19).

However selective, however conventional, the point is made: in the country there is peace, freshness, all that is holy: in the town, crowds, squalor, noise and pollution (20). In this section of Oliver Twist there are some strange lines, which do not seem to have been commented on before, which confirm the almost Rousseau-like pastoral assumptions of Dickens' mind, and suggest an almost Wordsworthian belief in original human purity and innocence: Dickens has been saying that sometimes even those who have lived and worked in cities and grown almost to love "each brick and stone" have at the end of their lives recalled the country as a foretaste of the pleasures of life in Heaven. Then follows a section which suggests that we all have an unconscious of a former, happier, simpler state of life which modern man has sacrificed as a result of "Progress" - "The memories which peaceful country scenes call up, are not of this world, nor its thoughts and hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us how to weave fresh garlands for the graves of those we loved; may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred; but beneath all this, there lingers, in the least reflective mind, a vague and half-formed consciousness of having held such feelings long before, in some remote and distant time..." (21).

This peaceful, natural beauty is contrasted to the city, the world of men, the habitat of the grim Sikes who is so

seldom seen in daylight, of the dreadful Fagin, accompanied from his very first introduction by associations of dirt, darkness, grime and filth. Sike's surroundings are the antithesis of Oliver's place of country sojourn: "...the filthiest part of Little Saffron Hill" in a "dark and gloomy den, where a flaring gas-light burnt all day in winter-time: where no ray of sun ever shone in the summer..." (22). Fagin's den is a "very dirty place... Spiders had built their webs in the angles of the walls...mice would scamper across the floor... In all the rooms, the mouldering shutters were fast closed: and the bars which held them were screwed tight into the wood; the only light which was admitted, stealing its way through round holes at the top: which made the rooms more gloomy..." (23). Fagin, the personification of self-interest, the apotheosis of cut-throat commercialism, seems to stand as a symbol of all that is evil in city life: Dickens describes him going out on a chill, damp, windy night, "The mud lay thick upon the stones: and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down... It seemed just the night when it benefitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along...the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal." (24). "It is evident the man is a thorough cockney." wrote John Ruskin to W.H. Harrison in 1841, "from his way of talking about hedgerows, and honeysuckles, and village spires..." (25).

What was Dickens' purpose?, and is that purpose in any

way retarded by the use of a conventional pastoralism? It is true that the countryside which Nell and Trent flee to is not real, it is highly selective; but pastoral in its very nature is a highly selective convention (26). Pastoral stresses the simple things of life, simplicity of manners, plain but nourishing food, a way of life untainted by civilisation - all of which is invariably contrasted to the corruption of "advanced" communities, represented in classical pastoral by the corruption in royal courts and palaces and in modern pastoral by the corruption of money and the city life.

Pastoral fulfills a very serious need in human beings; as Gilbert Highet says, we have invented modern counterparts - "idyllic peasants or idealised countrymen outside our own metropolitan cities... The Swiss, the Indians of the south-western United States; the Bavarians (with their wonderful passion play) Steinbeck's drunken but heroic paesanoes...the pawky Highlanders, the cowboys of Wyoming; the fishers of the Aran Islands...the innumerable converted farm-houses and re-built cottages and primitive pictures and rustic furniture which we covet - all are the products of a real need..." (27). Influenced no doubt by Dr. Johnson's summary dismissal of pastoral, (28) we tend to assume that because it became so conventionalised, pastoral had little to offer: the truth seems to be that it answered to a real need. The durability of the pastoral convention is impressive: from Theocritus and Virgil the mode runs through the Middle Ages. It was very strong during the Renaissance, we think of Lodge's Rosalynde, of Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar, of Love's Labours Lost, As You Like It,

Twelfth Night, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Winter's Tale and of Cervante's Galatea, which Don Quixote saves from burning (29). When the Don gives up fighting he wants to be a countryman. Sydney's Arcadia is probably the greatest English contribution in the pastoral mode (30). Milton's L'Allegro (31), Il Penseroso (32), Comus (33) all show the vitality of the convention. Arcadia was popular throughout the eighteenth century; it was brought up to date as Sydney's Arcadia Modernized in 1725. Richardson obviously knew it well, the very title of Pamela is taken from it (34) and he used incidents from it (35). The Spectator said it should be in all ladies' libraries (36).

Pastoral proved a durable form in the eighteenth century; Pope (died 1744) Ambrose Philips (died 1749) John Gay (died 1732) Sir John Denham (died 1669) Allan Ramsay (died 1758) William Shenstone (died 1763) John Cunningham (died 1773). (37). The idea, present in much of The Old Curiosity Shop, that there was a Golden Age when men lived in simple contentment, that this was destroyed by men's greed and avarice, this idea is very typical of eighteenth century pastoral (38) and is carried on through Wordsworth:

Once, Man entirely free, alone and wild,
Was blest as free - for he was nature's child.
He, all superior but his God disdained,
Walked none restraining, and by none restrained:
Confessed no law but what his reason taught,
Did all he wished, and wished but what he ought...(39)

The same rustic ideality runs throughout Washington Irving's

Sketch Book (1820). It is not without interest here that he too wrote a biography of Goldsmith (40). The Sketch Book, which we know to have been a favourite of Dickens (41), is full of Goldsmithian rusticity. The essay on Rural Life in England is prefaced by the Lines of Cowper on "Domestic life in rural pleasures past" (42). "An immense metropolis, like London," Irving writes, "is calculated to make men selfish... It is in the country that the Englishman gives scope to his natural feelings..." (43). Throughout he idealises the country: The Angler, The Pride of the Village, John Bull, Rural Funerals, The Boar's Head Tavern, The Country Church. The English countryman, Irving claimed, has virtues all his own "all plain, homebred and unaffected...he is like his old oak, rough without but sound and solid within..." (44).

J. Hillis Miller comments on the "rural remnants of a good traditional society" found in The Old Curiosity Shop (45). Nell and Trent flee the commercial evils of the city and seek peace in the country. The city seems to stand for the modern life, the country for the simple, good life we have lost.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made:
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more:
His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.

But times are altered; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land and dispossess the swain... (46)

This is very much the kind of rural England to which Nell and her grandfather retreat. As they leave the city morning is just coming, and Dickens describes how birds in their cages, prisoners in jail behind bars, mice in their holes, animals confined in their dens, - all symbols of confinement - long to be free and in the sunlight. (47). The streets they journey through are called a "labyrinth" (48) and they pass through noise and bustle; they go through the haunts of "commerce and great traffic, where many people were resorting, and business was already rife..." (49). The old man feels that murder and ruin were crouching in every street. They pass through slums where the shops sold "goods that only poverty could buy." (50). This is a wide track of human misery the novelist tells us "for the humble followers of the camp of wealth pitch their tents round it for many a mile..." (51). Damp rotten houses, many of them to let and "children, scantily fed and clothed, spread over every street, and sprawling in the dust..." (52). The mothers and fathers are shabby and slipshod; the men have occupations which bring them in their daily bread "and little more" (53). The whole city is fringed with a tangled growth

of nettles, dock-weed, coarse grass "heaped in rank confusion." (54). It is masterfully done (55). We have a selection of relevances which bespeak sordid commercialism, lack of liberty, oppression, poverty, neglect, squalor, filth, decay - and yet is real, we see it as Nell and Trent pass through it. (56).

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay..."

Dickens has this theme constantly in mind in this novel: he shows how the people in the city "decay" in the debris of their own society, as a result of trying to accumulate wealth. Old Trent is a personification of this theme - we see him literally decay as a direct result of his trying to accumulate wealth. (57). Immediately they are free from the city they sense the beautiful things of the country, which is pointed up by contrast to seem almost a paradise: "...looking back at old Saint Paul's looming through the smoke, its cross peeping above the cloud...and glittering in the sun..." (58). A traveller, says Dickens, might from thence look back into this "Babel" surrounded by the "invading army of bricks and mortar" (59). In a pleasant field the old man and Nell sit down to rest and have a simple breakfast "some slices of bread and meat". Immediately the sounds and scents of the country are contrasted to the polluted life of the town they have left: "The freshness of the day, the singing of the birds, the beauty of the waving grass, the deep green leaves, the wild flowers, and the thousand exquisite scents and sounds that floated in the air, - deep joys to most of us, but most of all to those whose life is in a crowd or who live solitary in great cities as in the

bucket of a human well, - sank into their breasts and made them very glad..." (60)

Old Trent exclaims that they are free of the city forever "They shall never lure us back." (61) and he says that now he is away from the city he "shall never feel ill again..." (62). Nell laves her hands and face in a pool of clear water, and likewise baptises Grandfather Trent: thus are they reborn in a better, purer, simpler life (63). The metaphoric strength of this act and what it stands for should not be passed over. The old man is soon calmed and falls asleep "singing to himself in a low voice, like a little child." (64). They continue on their journey: "The road was pleasant, lying between beautiful pastures and fields of corn..." above them a lark sings (65). From the noise of crowds, the sights of desolation, the busyness of crowds they have now escaped to the sounds of nature, the sights of growing things and the industry of bees. The contrast with the town is clear enough: "They were now in the open country; the houses were very few and scattered at long intervals... Occasionally they came upon a cluster of poor cottages, some with a chair or low board put across the open door to keep the scrambling children from the road, others shut up close while all the family were working in the fields. These were often the commencement of a little village: and after an interval came a wheelwright's shed...then perhaps a blacksmith's forge; then a thriving farm with sleepy cows lying about the yard, and horses peering over the low wall and scampering away when harnessed horses passed upon the road, as though in triumph at their freedom. ...pigs, turning up the ground in search of

dainty food...plump pigeons skimming round the roof or strutting on the eaves; and ducks and geese, far more graceful in their own conceit, waddling awkwardly about the edges of the pond or sailing glibly on its surface. The farm-yard passed, then came the little inn; the humbler beershop; and the village tradesman's; then the lawyer's and the parson's...the church peeped out modestly from a clump of trees... Then came the trim-hedge fields on either hand, and the open road again." (66)

The emphasis is on the liberty of the countryside, the sense of space, the sense of life going on all the time, the activities of the children - we shall recall this when we come to the city/industrial scenes, here the children die and suffer - the whole family working harmoniously together in the open, the sense of a whole community - forge, farm, parson, crops and animals - a life governed by a natural rhythm not subject to the fluctuations of a speculative economy. It may seem stylised, rather too much like the Victorian illustrations to Goldsmith or Gray, but it makes its points and makes them well. (67).

Other critics have pointed out that the flight from the city into the country is a flight into death, but I find that again and again the quality of life is affirmed in this novel. "Here the city...is as dark a place as in Oliver Twist...and it impels its victims...to flee to the quasi-divine purity of the country, which is repeatedly identified with the remote springs of childhood, innocence and peace. If this appears simply to take up the standard of the romantic theme of escape from the present into the past, and from the city to the country-side,

it does so only to demonstrate how impossible such escape has become..." thus writes Donald Fanger, and he goes on to show that the journey is one towards death. (68).

The problem of interpretation arises when the rural scenes in the novel are judged by the standards of "realism" - both Fanger and Hillis Miller assume that Dickens is comparing contemporary city life with contemporary rural life, and that weighing both in the balance he comes down firmly in favour of the rural order, which has passed away, hence - apparently - the death of Nell. But Dickens, I think, is not writing realistically: we have only to compare this with Hardy (69) to see the difference: Dickens is making a point much more generally, a timeless point with a permanent relevance: this is why he uses a convention, the landscape of The Old Curiosity Shop is heavily Augustan. We must see it as a symbolic statement of a real truth.

There are two ways of dealing with the novel, realistically or symbolically. Many critics have taken the novel on the realistic level: George Gissing says "the aspiration of the story is to the country road winding along under a pure sky..." (70) and although I think he does grasp the essential point of the novel (71) I do not think he really appreciates Dickens' method of presenting the moral of the book. Harvey Peter Suck-Smith talks of "an archetypal journey through hell and purgatory towards paradise..." (72) but does no more than throw out this suggestion. John Lucas believes that Dickens writes well about the city and ineptly about the country, and does not seem

aware of Dickens' use of the convention in which both city and country are treated as standard representations of the spoiled and unspoiled world of men. (73). He senses the element of "myth" in the rural scenes, but does not see that both town and land are mythologised in The Old Curiosity Shop. A.O.J. Cockshut believes that the pastoralism of this novel is morbid, diseased, that the journey is a flight from logic and reality: it is as if they are going "backwards in time" he says (74). Earle Davis is quite unaware of any symbolic overtones at all, Dickens, he believes, followed the picaresque example and "he sent Nell and her grandfather north, giving them varied adventures as they travel..." (75). Professor Barbara Hardy finds the pastoral scenes characterised by flat and banal handling of description (76). Angus Wilson admires the "good" parts - Quilp, Swiveller, the Marchioness, but shares the modern reader's difficulties in "taking" the main plot, the Nell, Trent and journey element (77), in fact he categorically denies the legendary, mythological atmosphere of the novel, "the story has a framework of intended reality, it is laid in the England of approximately its own time..." (78). Gabriel Pearson indicates the "something mythic...as well as regressive" (79) in Nell and Grandfather's search for peace, but suggests that Dickens is indicating an escape into the land of Cockayne (80). The critic who has, in my view, come nearest to the heart of this puzzling novel is John W. Gibson in an article in The Dickensian in 1964: Nell makes her journey not merely as a poverty stricken child, he says, "but as an outstanding symbol of the pure, the upright, the determinedly moral character struggling against the timeless elements of inhumanity, greed, treachery..."

and corruption of the moral vision." (81). Professor K.J. Fielding is unwilling to play any allegorical games, he sees the function of Quilp and Brass as light relief, there is "much more in The Old Curiosity Shop," he says, "than 'allegory' and Little Nell. In the company of Dick Swiveller, Quilp, Mrs. Jarley and Sampson and Sally Brass, the trailing clouds of sentiment are soon blown away. There are a dozen or more characters...who are wonderfully good company." (82).

But we must see, I think, that Dickens is using an ancient convention to demonstrate an ancient truth, and that this truth was forced upon him by seeing what he saw happening in Britain in the 1840's. The action of the novel is without strict time. The novelist shows us two ways of life: the city/industrial and the pastoral/rural. One way leads through corruption and greed, to Hell: "A long suburb of red-brick houses...where coal-dust and factory smoke darkened the shrinking leaves, and coarse rank flowers...the struggling vegetation sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace...a cheerless region, where not a blade of grass was seen to grow; where not a bud put forth its promise in the spring; where nothing green could live but on the surface of the stagnant pools, which here and there lay idly sweltering by the black roadside.... On every side...tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air... ..strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures; clanking their iron chains, shrieking

in their rapid whirl from time to time as though in torment unendurable, and making the ground tremble with their agonies... Men, women, children, wan in their looks and ragged in attire, tended the engines, fed their tributary fires...night, when the smoke was changed to fire; when every chimney spirited up its flame; and places...now shone red-hot, with figures moving to and fro within their blazing jaws, and calling to one another with hoarse cries..." (83).

The clues are all there - red, black, fire and flames, dust, smoke, the death of nature, hot breath and furnace, ugliness, the obscuring of light, shrieking, torture, agony, blazing jaws and the damned feeding the eternal furnaces - it is unmistakable: the modern Inferno. (84). The links between this nether world and the city is provided by the figure of Quilp. The link is established by his devilish associations - he describes himself as a "devil-may-care bachelor" (85), he threatens Tom Scott frequently with "lingering torments" (86) and is associated with smoke and fire: "he lighted his pipe, and smoked against the chimney until nothing of him was visible through the mist but a pair of red and highly inflamed eyes..." (87). Quilp's "summer house" recalls the description of the industrial hades Nell and Grandfather travel through, standing "on a piece of waste ground, blighted with the unwholesome smoke of factory chimneys, and echoing the clank of iron wheels and rush of troubled water..." (88). Quilp's drink is described as "fire" (89). Like Fagin, he is ubiquitous, turning up in town or country when and where least expected, and leaving no footprints. He is variously referred to as dwarf, imp, African

chief, demon, devil, evil spirit, cannibal (90). Mrs. Nubbles believes him to be that "Evil Power" who was "so vigorously attacked at Little Bethel." (91). Some of Quilp's actions are sadistic. He tortures Mrs. Nubbles' baby and threatens to pull such faces that the child will have fits (92). He performs sympathetic magic with the ship's figure-head (93). When Quilp dies the sky "was red with flame". His dwelling is burned down and as he dies is "a blazing ruin". (94). When he is buried a stake is driven through his heart and he is placed "in the centre of four lonely roads" (95). The vampire references are obvious. Thus the evil of the city (Quilp is after all a dreadful emblem of commercial enterprise carried to its ultimate) is linked with the hellish scenes of industrial England.

The other way of life leads into the country, which for Nell is only to be a brief period of her service as a novitiate for paradise. (96). What is good in this life is presented to us in The Old Curiosity Shop in terms which almost out-Goldsmith Goldsmith: almost but not quite. "The place of their retreat was in a little neighbourhood, consisting of farmers, who tilled their own grounds, and were equal strangers to opulence and poverty. As they had almost all the conveniences of life within themselves, they seldom visited towns or cities in search of superfluity. Remote from the polite, they still retained the primaeval simplicity of manners; and frugal by habit, they scarcely knew that temperance was a virtue. They wrought with cheerfulness on days of labour; but observed festivals as intervals of idleness and pleasure..." (97).

Dickens or Goldsmith? - It is Goldsmith, obviously: but look carefully, and you will notice that it is only the mode of expression, the actual vocabulary (98) which give it away: in essence the similarities are decisive.

The village where Nell and Trent meet the poor school-master is pure Goldsmith. They leave the public road and there come across a lane, shaded by trees which almost meet overhead. An old sign post directs them to a village, miles from the beaten track. They think they must have missed their way "But at last, to their great joy, it led downward in a steep descent, with over-hanging banks over which the foot-paths led; and the clustered houses of the village peeped out from the woody hollow below. It was a very small place. The men and boys were playing at cricket on the green..." (99). These scenes are indeed "lovely bowers of innocence and ease... Where humble happiness endeared each scene!" (100). The scene in which Nell and her grandfather find themselves is identical with Goldsmith's Auburn, the quiet little rural backwater, the contentment, solitude, the simple friendly game of cricket, the freedom from worry, the natural rhythm of life, a blest retirement, a retreat from care, a friend to life's decline: one who finds these things in the country, Goldsmith says, is not among (the) wretches, born to work and weep, Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep. Nor surly porter stands in guilty state, To spurn imploring famine from the gate; But on he moves to meet his latter end, Angels around befriending virtue's friend;

Bends to the grave with unperceived decay,
While resignation gently slopes the way;
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past. (101)

The very quality of the illustrations, which we know Dickens approved, catches this very eighteenth century tone (102). That very Goldsmithian character, the poor schoolmaster, is shown in Augustan garb greeting the city fugitives (103). The schoolmaster is sitting outside the schoolhouse among his flowers and beehives (traditional symbols of innocence and industry). "He had a kind face. In his plain old suit of black, he looked pale and meagre..." (104). His hospitality to the travellers is immediate. Nell looks around the schoolroom and notices "...a couple of forms, notched and cut and inked all over...a few dog's-eared books upon a high shelf; and beside them a motley collection of peg-tops, balls, kites, fishing-lines, marbles, half-eaten apples, and other confiscated property... Displayed on hooks upon the wall in all their terrors, were the cane and ruler; and near them... the Dunce's cap..." (105).

Around the walls are examples of a pupil's work in beautiful handwriting. How well these details seem to personify the village schoolmaster described by Goldsmith: a mixture of kindness and severity, learning and pedantry, riches of spirit and poverty of person:

..... skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school;
A man severe he was, and stern to view,
I knew him well, and every truant knew;
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face; ...
Yet he was kind, or, if he severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault;
The village all declared how much he knew ... (106)

When we see the poor schoolmaster take class the next day we see what a balanced mixture he is of severity and kindness, learning and innocence. Poverty, Dickens took as the natural accompaniment of a good teacher's life (107). The illustrations which show the village schoolmaster exhibit him as a figure in a wig and coat of eighteenth century style.

The whole of their journey through the country is a selection of set subjects from the pastoral convention, travelling showmen, country inns, waterways, country sports and labours; "I know little of the country," the furnace man tells Nell, "for such as I, pass all our lives before our furnace doors, and seldom go forth to breathe. But there are such places yonder... How could they be near us, and be green and fresh? The road lies too, through miles and miles, all lighted up by fires like ours - a strange black road..." (108). In all their journeying, Dickens says, Nell and her grandfather had never longed so ardently for the freedom of pure air and open country as they did then. (109).

Thus does Dickens give the traditional pastoral convention a new purpose, the innocent, unspoiled virtues have a new corrosive to avoid - industry. We know from his letters, that Dickens was deeply shocked and moved by what he saw in Birmingham and Wolverhampton in April 1840, and that he tried to convey his feelings in these sections of The Old Curiosity Shop which deal with the industrial midlands. "You will recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton: but I had conceived it so well in my mind," he wrote to Forster, "that the execution doesn't please me quite as well as I expected..." (110).

CHAPTER SIX

THE SHOP AND ITS CUSTOMERS

"Those who claim that Dickens exaggerated have no eyes and no ears, but only notions of what things and people are."

George Santayana: Soliloquies in England (1922) pp.65-6.

Contentment is one of Goldsmith's moral virtues. Lien Chi Altangi writes to the merchant of Amsterdam "You have been bred a merchant, and I a scholar; you, consequently, love money better than I. You can find pleasure in superfluity; I am perfectly content with what is sufficient." (1). The Vicar of Wakefield goes from one calamity to another, but all the time he preaches to his family that they should try and be content with what they have: "We are now poor...and wisdom bids us to conform to our humble situation. Let us then, without repining, give up those splendours with which numbers are wretched, and seek, in humbler circumstances, that peace with which all may be happy...we have still enough left for happiness if we are wise..." (2). Chapter IV is called "A Proof that even the humblest Fortune may grant Happiness, which depends not on Circumstances but Constitution." This is the very philosophy which Dickens puts into the mouth of Nell (3). When old Trent's fortunes begin drastically to ebb and Quilp is applying pressure, Nell urges grandfather to think not of winning a fortune, but of being content with what little they have: "Let us be beggars...I have no fear but we shall have enough... Let us walk through country places, and sleep in fields and under trees, and never think of money again, or anything that can make you sad, but rest at nights, and have the sun and wind upon our faces in the day..." (4). It is the old man's desire to make Nell rich, to make her into a lady, which impels him to gamble. He claims that he is quite innocent of the sin of coveteousness for himself, it is for her that he hopes and prays for money (5). This gambling is to lead him into evil ways and evil company. "I am no gambler," he claims, "I call

Heaven to witness that I never played for gain of mine, or love of play; that at every piece I staked, I whispered to myself that orphan's name and called on Heaven to bless the venture, which it never did. Whom did it prosper? Who were those with whom I played? Men who lived by plunder, profligacy, and riot, squandering their gold in doing ill..." (6).

He goes on explicitly to state that it was his fear of poverty which made him take to games of chance, he refers to "the sorrows that wait on poverty." It brings him no pleasure, no good company, no rest, no contentment - quite the contrary: "I found no pleasure in it... What has it ever brought to me but anxious days and sleepless nights, but loss of health and peace of mind..." (7). Nell tells Mrs. Quilp that before Grandfather began all this borrowing of money from Quilp he used to be "so different. We were once so happy and he so cheerful and contented! You cannot think what a sad change has fallen on us since...I am very happy still, I ought to feel happier perhaps than I do, but you cannot think how it grieves me sometimes to see him alter so..." (8). Nell is persistently identified with contentment, with being happy: "We will be happy... We never can be here..." (9). The poor schoolmaster also echoes these sentiments: "There's a small allowance of money... It is not much, but still enough to live upon in this retired spot. By clubbing our funds together, we shall do bravely; no fear of that." he tells Nell (10).

Against this we have the continued and frustrated anger at poverty from the old man: "See the curse of poverty, Nell...

If I could have gone on a little longer, only a little longer, the luck would have turned..." (11). Eventually he steals her remaining gold in order to go on playing for money. She tries to reason with him, and the basis of her reasoning is that we should be content: "Let me persuade you, then...to think no more of gains or losses, and to try no fortune but the fortune that we pursue together... Have we been worse off...since you forgot these cares, and we have been travelling on together? Have we not been much better and happier without a home to shelter us, than ever we were in that unhappy house, when they were upon your mind... Only remember what we have been since that bright morning when we turned our backs upon it for the last time...only remember what we have been since we have been free of all those miseries - what peaceful days and quiet nights we have had - what pleasant times we have known - what happiness we have enjoyed. If we have been tired or hungry, we have been soon refreshed and slept the sounder for it. Think what beautiful things we have seen, and how contented we have felt..."(12).

The message of the novel seems to be clear: the conditions of the poor are terrible indeed, but it is best to be humble and as content as you can. Dickens does not minimise the conditions of the poor, nor does he minimise the terrible effects of violent action and demonstration against those conditions, which he suggests is destructive and pointless. It is the particular function of Kit and his family to point the moral of the poor but contented home: "...if ever household affections and loves are graceful things, they are graceful in the poor. The ties that bind the wealthy and the proud to home may be

forged on earth, but those which link the poor man to his humble hearth are of the true metal and bear the stamp of Heaven...the poor man's attachment to the tenements he holds, which strangers have held before, and may tomorrow occupy again, has a worthier root, struck deep into a purer soil. His household goods are of flesh and blood...he has no property but in the affections of his own heart; and when they endear bare floors and walls, despite of rags and toil and scanty meals, that man has his love of home from God, and his rude hut becomes a solemn place..."

(13). This is to be a recurring theme in Dickens' work. We find it in the poor but homely family life of the Cratchits, and in Sol Gills' household which is compared - unfavourably - with the chill splendour of Mr. Dombey's mansion.

But he does not see it as all that ideal. The poor have much to endure, "contentment" is thus not easy to achieve: it is hard to be happy when the homes the poor live in are so dreadful. "...if those who rule the destinies of nations would but remember this - if they would but think how hard it is for the very poor to have engendered in their hearts that love of home...when they live in dense and squalid masses where social decency is lost, or rather never found, - if they would but turn aside from the wide thoroughfares and great houses, and strive to improve the wretched dwellings in bye-ways where only Poverty may walk... It is no light matter - no outcry from the working vulgar... In love of home the love of country has its rise; and who are the truer patriots or the best in time of need - those who venerate the land, owning its wood, and stream, and earth, and all that they produce? Or those who love their

country, boasting not a foot of ground in all its wide domain?" (14).

Dickens had travelled to the Midlands and to North Wales to see the cotton mills and working conditions in October 1838, he saw Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Manchester. His letters speak of "miles of cinder-paths and blazing furnaces and roaring steam-engines" which loom through the fog and smoke like some enormous Alberich's cave of clamorous glares, "such a mass of dirt, gloom and misery as I never before witnessed." (15).

Lord Ashley had offered to arrange for the novelist to see what working conditions in the textile industries were really like. The novelist wrote to thank him: "...So far as seeing goes," he said, "I have seen enough for my purpose, and what I have seen has disgusted me and astonished me beyond all measure. I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in the 'Nickleby', or wait some other opportunity, I have not yet determined..." (16). We know that Dickens was positively and personally aware of the living and working conditions of the labouring thousands: It is as well to bear in mind when considering the general drift of The Old Curiosity Shop, which is towards patience, humility and contentment. If other evidence were needed, we have his letter to John Forster about the book A Narrative of the Experience and Suffering of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple, written by Himself. This was written in 1841 and was in the catalogue of Dickens' library at the novelist's death. (17). He was very affected by it and wrote to Forster, "I wish we were all

in Eden again, - for the sake of these toiling creatures..." (18). However strongly Dickens feels, his message is caution, patience and restraint: we note that he is never on the side of those who agitate - Barnaby Rudge, Hard Times and A Tale of Two Cities give us evidence of that: but, like Carlyle, whom he admired so much, he was aware of the smoke that goes before the fire. (19). And he was anxious that nothing should fan it.

Discontent, Carlyle saw, was already manifesting itself in "brickbats, cheap pikes, and even splutterings of conflagration". (20). This matters to all of us, he said and if nothing is done about the dreadful conditions which give rise to these discontents "something will do itself one day, and in a fashion that will please nobody." (21). Carlyle goes on to talk of "this bitter discontent of the Working Classes" (22) which is "mad, incendiary, nefarious" (23). In part, Dickens seems to follow Carlyle's views (24) and to plead for patience and humility on the part of the poor, and benevolence and reform (change of heart) on the part of the powers that be, of employers and of the individual. Change of heart is absolutely basic to Dickens' Social philosophy. (25). It is worth noting that this too is a very Carlylean notion, the philosophic purpose of Signs of the Times is to show that the condition of England will not be changed or improved by any ism, institution, party, body - but only by individual reform: "To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on himself. (26).

Dickens' particular contribution to social comment, his extension of the Carlylean doctrine, is, I think, his presentation of what those terrible conditions are, and what industrial city-life is actually doing to people. He is concerned that we should realise the cost in human terms of social ideology of Miss Monflathers, who scolds Nell for being a wax-work child when she might have "the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine..." (27).

Nell and Grandfather are hungry and tired when they are travelling through the Midlands. Nell knocks on the door of a hovel to beg for charity. A gaunt, miserable man answers "Do you see that?" pointing to a kind of bundle on the ground. "That's a dead child. I and five hundred other men were thrown out of work three months ago. That is my third dead child, and last. Do you think I have charity to bestow, or a morsel of bread to spare?" (28). This is quite specific comment: the early forties were not a period of a boom in speculation: speculation (for which Old Trent's gambling mania is so sadly appropriate a symbol) had done its work, and trade was in a terrible depression.

Dickens shows how dreadful these conditions are, and also how awful things become when the oppressed poor take the solution into their own hands: "...when bands of unemployed labourers paraded in the roads, or clustered by torchlight round their leaders, who told them in stern language of their

wrongs, and urged them on to frightful cries and threats; when maddened men, armed with sword and firebrand, spurned the tears and prayers of women who would restrain them, rushed forth on errands of terror and destruction, to work no ruin half so surely as their own..." (29). All this is again quite specific observation: he is clearly thinking of the early Chartist agitation, and we should note the unsympathetic portrait of the rabble-rouser (30) and the quite specific references to weapons and firebrands. Dickens says that such action will ruin those who perpetrate it.

Nell knocks on another door and finds that this hovel is occupied by two families. An official of the parish has just returned a child to the family because although he was charged with theft, the authorities have been merciful because he was deaf and dumb. "But as I had compassion on his infirmities, and thought he might have learned no better, I have managed to bring him back to you..." (31). The other mother now asks for her son back "who was transported for the same offence." "Was he deaf and dumb, woman?" "Was he not, Sir?" "You know he was not." "He was" cried the woman, "He was deaf, dumb, and blind, to all that was good and right, from his cradle. Her boy may have learned no better! Where did mine learn better? Where could he? Who was there to teach him better, or where was it to be learnt?" (32).

Over and above these individual tragedies, Dickens paints for us the general tone of modern industrial life, its busy, indifferent loneliness; its aimless hurry, its contemptible

insect quality: "The throng of people hurried by, in two opposite streams, with no symptom of cessation or exhaustion; intent upon their own affairs; and undisturbed in their business speculations, by the roar of carts and waggons laden with clashing wares, the slipping of horses' feet upon the wet and greasy pavement, the rattling of the rain on windows and umbrella-tops, the jostling of the more impatient passengers, and all the noise and tumult of a crowded street in the high tide of its occupation: while the two poor strangers, stunned and bewildered by the hurry they beheld, but had no part in, looked mournfully on; feeling amidst the crowd a solitude which has no parallel, but in the thirst of the ship-wrecked mariner, who, tossed to and fro upon the billows of a mighty ocean, his red eyes blinded by looking on the water which hems him in on every side, has not one drop to cool his burning tongue." (33). This is a marvellous description of the effects of alienation, and we - seeing it through the wanderer's eyes - sense their feelings of loneliness in that crowd (34). Men, Dickens seems to be saying, have become mechanical: "We war with rude Nature; and by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, loaded with spoils." (35).

But the cost of our victory is the passing, busy automata we see crowding the street in The Old Curiosity Shop: "Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand," says Carlyle in Signs of the Times - one of the essays in the Miscellanies I'm sure Dickens knew well. (36).

What is it which holds all the seemingly diverse threads

Dickens makes further use of Chuckster to indicate the vacuous world of fashionable city life: Chuckster attempts to make himself attractive to the Garlands' servant girl Barbara - he swaggers down the garden and takes up a position at a convenient ogling distance, where he places "one hand on his hip, and with the other adjusted his flowing hair. This is a favourite attitude in the polite circles, and accompanied with a graceful whistling has been known to do immense execution. Such, however, is the difference between town and country, that nobody took the smallest notice of this insinuating figure..." (40). No one notices him because the others are bidding Kit, the single gentleman and Mr. Garland goodbye and God's speed by "kissing hands to each other, waving handkerchiefs, and the like tame and vulgar practices." (41). Here the contrast is drawn between what is simple, unaffected and natural, and what is sophisticated, nurtured and a la mode.

Quilp is the personification of money-grubbing and is directly linked, symbolically, with those hellish furnaces and ghastly cinder paths of the industrial north and midlands. He even excuses himself from Trent's company when he is raving on about the certainty of his winning - eventually - at gaming, by saying "I'm sorry I've got an appointment in the City...or I should have been very glad to have spent half an hour with you while you composed yourself." (42).

Codlin and Short are interested in Nell and Grandfather only because of the possibility of making money out of them, they believe that these two are fugitives and if returned to

the performance of her duties." (49).

The "waxworks scenes" have been frequently praised by modern critics (50) but we should be aware that comic figure though she undoubtedly is, Mrs. Jarley has a keen eye for the commercial use and value of a child like Nell. Behind the undoubted drollery of the dinner at the Jolly Sandboys where the conversation turns on what is to happen when giants and dwarfs grow old, there lurk sordid commercial considerations: "The older a dwarf is, the better worth he is" says Mr. Vuffin, "a grey-haired dwarf, well wrinkled, is beyond all suspicion. But a giant weak in the legs and not standing upright! - Keep him in the caravan, but never show him..." (51).

The gipsies too are no run-of-the-mill romantic raggle-taggle: this we are told quite pointedly, "There were no women or children, as she had seen in other gipsy camps..." (52). They are wandering swindlers and card sharpers. Trent moans that they keep him poor by taking his money from him, and the reply they give him aptly summarizes the bleak nature of their association, "Confound you, what do you mean?... Keep you poor! You'd keep us poor if you could, wouldn't you? That's the way with you whining, puny, pitiful players. When you lose, you're martyrs; but I don't find that when you win, you look upon the other losers in that light..." (53). How apt a miniature of the modern capitalist world. The whole of this conversation is staged by the gambler, List, and the gipsies to "con" more money out of Trent (54).

Quilp's legal advisor is also a star of this commercial galaxy, named with striking aptness, Brass; "an attorney of no very good repute from Bevis Marks...he was a tall meagre man, with a nose like a wen, a protruding forehead, retreating eyes, and hair of a deep red..." (55). We note the red hair, with its associations of Judas and thirty pieces of silver: he is later to sell the innocent Kit and betray his own master, Quilp. Quilp calls him "Judas" to his face (56). Brass is a master of swindles and crooked dealing and is thus well qualified to be Quilp's lawyer. His dissembling nature is well demonstrated in the scene where Kit's "guilt" is discussed (57). "Look at him, gentlemen! See how he changes colour. Which of us looks the guilty person - he or I?" But Kit screams in vain (58).

Dick Swiveller is an interesting and on the whole attractive figure, and has received a fair amount of critical attention (59). Most critics turn with relief from the tale of Nell and grandfather to the "comic relief" afforded by - among others - Dick and the Marchioness (60). His role in The Old Curiosity Shop is in need of some definition: he continues and develops the money-theme of the novel and provides a sardonic commentary on the action of the tale. He is obsessed with debts, he is a personification of a society which feels obliged to live beyond its financial means, an adolescent Micawber. His early conversations are full of references to cigars, public schools, snuff, spirits and high living (61). Fred Trent suggests that Dick should marry Nelly in order to inherit the old man's money (62). But, as Dick observes, there is an

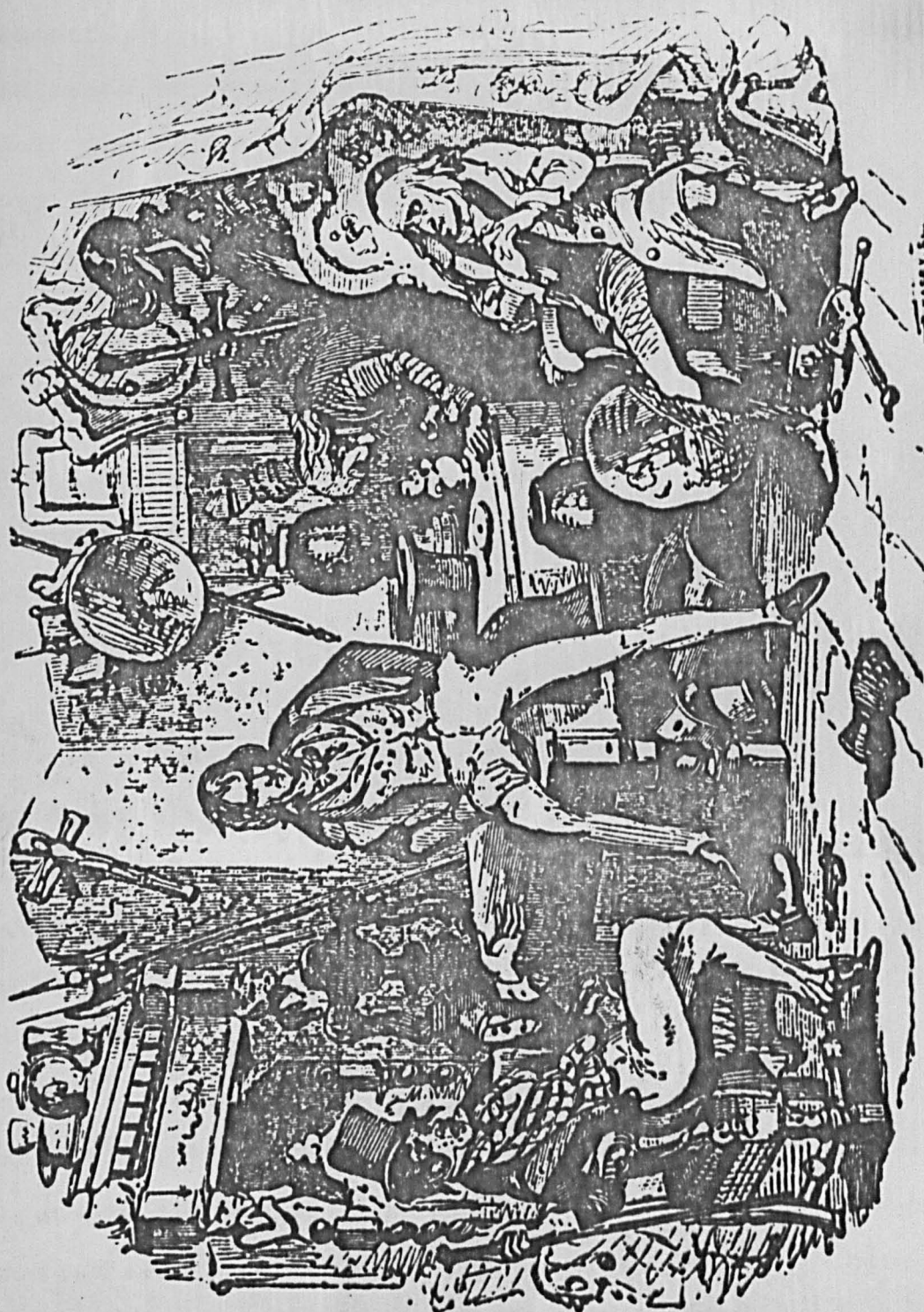
aggravating, spiteful quality in the aged that prevents 'em dying when it would be convenient for their children - "you can't calculate upon 'em, and even then they deceive you just as often as not." (63). Dick confesses that he has "no insurmountable objection to marrying anybody plentifully endowed with money or movables, who could be induced to take him." (64). Having gorged himself on food obtained on credit, it is Dick who can exclaim "Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long." (65). Dick enters in a memoranda book all the shops where he owes money: "This dinner today closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There's only one avenue to the Strand left open now, and I shall have to stop up that tonight with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in every direction, that in about a month's time, unless my aunt sends me a remittance, I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way..." (66).

We should note the care which Dickens went to in giving us our first impression of Dick. As Dr. Harvey Peter Sucksmith shows, the careful revision in the manuscripts of the novels demonstrates how Dickens deliberately focuses his earliest impressions of a character by means of as powerful a complex effect as he can produce (67). Dick is not a constant character. We see him change as a result of what happens to him in the novel. He begins as a member of Quilp's party - a cheat and money-grubber; he is almost as distracted as Quilp when he discovers that Nell and old Trent have fled, as it threatened the complete overthrow of the project "in which he bore so conspicuous a part" (68) to get the old man's money by marrying

Dick Swiveller, Fred Trent and Grandfather.

"It's a devil of a thing, gentlemen...when relations fall out and disagree. If the wing of friendship should never moult a feather, the wing of relationship should never be clipped, but always be expanded and serene..."

The Old Curiosity Shop Chapter 2.



Nell, although he disguises his real motives in calling there with his accustomed faded rhetoric. He tells Quilp to inform Nell and Trent that he was "wafted here upon the pinions of concord..." and came "to remove, with the rake of friendship, the seeds of mutual violence and heart-burning, and to sow in their place, the germs of social harmony." (69). We should note the similarity of this mode of speech with Micawber's. Dickens seems to associate financial shiftiness with a florid, ornate style of dialogue: but we should realise, beneath the comedy, that he is at this stage Quilp's ally. In fact he is a surrogate son to the dwarf. "Here is a miserable orphan" Dick declares. "Then...let me be a father to you!" Quilp answers (70), and Quilp swears friendship to Dick and Fred Trent (71).

Dick's view of Nell neglects all her real qualities, she is just a commodity of flesh and bone to him - worth marrying for Trent's money: "Fine girl of her age, but small," is how he sees her (72). Dick's private world of fantasy has been noted before (73) but I think the discussions have centred too much on his comedy, and the serious possibilities of his role have been neglected. He has a language all his own, a kind of half-remembered half-parody of the more obvious debris of the early nineteenth century romantics, interlarded with rich layers of stage melodramatic dialogue: the names of Byron, Moore, Dibdin, Thomas Haynes Bayly come readily to mind, followed by Home, Kotzebue, Colman, Holcroft, Knowles, Jerrold and Bulwer-Lytton (74). We should not accept Dick in the early part of this novel as a wholly admirable character. He is dirty, slippery, two-faced and pretentious.

It has been suggested that there is something of Dickens himself in Swiveller (75). If this is so, we have here what may be unconscious self-criticism, for in Dick the novelist attacks the phoney-romantic, the cheap-poetic. For this kind of literary pretentiousness Dickens had a shrewd and a cruel eye; one thinks of the devastating lyrics of the poetic Snodgrass, of the commercial exploitation of the muse by Mr. Slum (76), and of the Byronic lodger in Sketches by Boz, Mr. Septimus Hicks: "a tallish, white-faced young man, with spectacles, and a black ribbon round his neck instead of a neckerchief..." (77). He shares with Richard Swiveller the ability to bespatter the most mundane verbal intercourse with poetic scraps. "I saw a devilish number of parcels in the passage when I came home" - this is Hicks' cue, and he rejoins "Materials for the toilet, no doubt..."

'-- Much linen, lace, and several pair

Of stockings, slippers, brushes, combs, complete;

With other articles of ladies fair,

To keep them beautiful, or leave them neat.'

'Is that from Milton?' inquired Mr. Simpson. 'No - from Byron', returned Mr. Hicks, with a look of profound contempt. He was quite sure of his author, because he never read any other." (78). This is very much the kind of young man Dick is when we first meet him, the thin veneer of romantic sensibility scarcely hiding the cynical money-motivation of his being: "what is the odds so long as the fire of the soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather...we may be good and happy without riches, Fred..." are among the first words we hear him utter (79).

For much of the novel he remains firmly in the city camp (80), associated with business, debt, conning money, and the shady side of the law (he actually works for Brass). Dickens makes this point for us quite clearly in the scene where he is confronted by Kit. Dick is partnered by Chuckster, a significant clue to his placement in the Dickens' world, as Chuckster seems to stand for the world of sophisticated high fashion, social snobbery and materialism. Chuckster is a fellow member of the Glorious Apollos and we see them working very well in partnership at quotations "in dialogue" (81). Chuckster's verbal delivery is accompanied by "that air of graceful trifling which so well became him" (82). Chuckster delivers a destructive summary of Kit's character before Kit comes in, he calls him a "young Snob" and a young thief. (83). Dick is easily led on to be overbearing to Kit and tells him that he may leave the letter he has brought for the gentleman upstairs "And if you're to wait for an answer, Sir, you may wait in the passage, Sir, which is an airy and well-ventilated apartment, Sir." (84). Chuckster then becomes threatening but both he and Dick are confounded by the coolness and goodhumour of Kit's demeanour. When he is called for by the gentleman himself, Dick cannot resist bullying him: "Now young man," he says to Kit, "don't you hear you're to go upstairs? Are you deaf." (85). On the whole Dick does not show up very well in this encounter, and although Dickens tells us immediately after Kit's exit that Swiveller was "in the main a good-natured fellow" (86) we can see how impressionable he is. When with Chuckster, he acts like Chuckster.

Unwittingly he is also used by Brass to frame the innocent Kit. We notice here that Brass is able to gain Dick's confidence by adopting his mode of speech, and thus get his secrets out of him. "A contented spirit, Mr. Richard, is the sweetness of existence. Anybody been here, Sir?" he asks Dick (87). "Only my friend," replied Dick, " 'May we ne'er want a - ' " " 'Friend,' " Brass chimed in quickly, " 'or a bottle to give him. 'Ha ha! That's the way the song runs, isn't it? A very good song, Mr. Richard, very good... Nobody else at all been, Mr. Richard?" "Only somebody to the lodger," replied Mr. Swiveller. "...with him now." "With him now!" cried Brass; "Ha ha! There let 'em be, merry and free, toor rul lol le. Eh, Mr. Richard? ..." "Oh certainly," replied Dick. "And who," said Brass, shuffling among his papers, "who is the lodger's visitor - not a lady visitor, I hope, eh Mr. Richard? ... 'When lovely woman stoops to folly' - and all that - eh, Mr. Richard?" (88). Another piece of evidence which indicates Dick's close alliance with the world of Quilp, Brass and money is that when he plays cribbage with himself and a dummy "for twenty, thirty, or sometimes even fifty thousand pounds aside, besides many hazardous bets to a considerable amount." (89).

But Swiveller changes. He realises the essence of his name and swivels from one set of allegiances to another: he leaves the world of money, sharp practice and social pretension, to join the forces of good, of kindness, patience and common humanity. In this respect he has something in common with Shakespeare's Albany (90). By consorting with evil, he comes to learn the nature of evil and turns from it. We notice that

even when playing cards with the small servant he retains his social pretensions. To make the card games seem "more real and pleasant" Dick says that he will call the girl "the Marchioness". (91). At this stage he refers to Brass as "Baron Sampsono Brasso" (92). But there are already signs of his real goodness, beneath his greasy-fashionable exterior there lurks a kindly heart. He is immediately and immensely kind to the "small servant" - he performs for her an acts of utter human beneficence - he feeds her. "Why, how thin you are! What do you mean by it?" he demands. (93). "It aint my fault," she answers. "Could you eat bread and meat? ...Yes? I thought so. Did you ever taste beer?" "I had a sip of it once," said the small servant. "Here's a state of things," cried Mr. Swiveller, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "She never tasted it - it can't be tasted in a sip!..." (94). He treats her to a plate of bread, beef and beer and gin; "First of all, clear that off..." he urges (95).

Although we may find Dick's social pretensions amusing, it is necessary to remind ourselves that at this stage, even while he is being kind to the small servant, he is instrumental in ensnaring the innocent Kit Nubbles (96). Once Brass has used him for his own purposes, he is dismissed (97). But by this stage there are real signs that Richard is beginning to change sides; it is out of the goodness of his heart that he sends Kit in prison some beer inscribed with a cheery verse of Tom Moore's - slightly (and comically) adapted. The evil work of the city villains Quilp and Brass in destroying the innocent (Kit) is ably complete by that civilised institution, the court

of law, where truth is a sorry victim of the legal practitioners. This is yet another example of Dickens' acute and chronic distrust of the law and how clearly he saw the sad difference between the law and justice. (98). "Nobody knows the truth, everybody believes a falsehood - and all because of the ingenuity of Mr. Brass's gentleman." (99). In helping Mrs. Nubbles as she is overcome on hearing the verdict, Richard now takes the first step which will lead ultimately to the unmasking of Brass and Quilp: "Oh! is there no good gentleman here, who will take care of her!" exclaims Kit (100). Richard Swiveller now appears and takes her "in one arm after the manner of theatrical ravishers" (101) and takes her home. He is still unmistakably Swiveller, as Dickens says "And what astonishing absurdities in the way of quotation from song and poem he perpetrated on the road, no man knows." (102).

He already suspects that Brass is really responsible for the strange disappearance of the money. The part he plays in getting justice done is a major one. What is the function of Richard Swiveller in this novel? It seems to me that Dickens is showing a light-sentimental figure in collision with reality. The romantic, "fashionable" side of Dick's character is well presented in his songs (103) and by the stagey dialogue he produces sometimes, well, most of the time until his change of heart. Even when he comes round after his fever, he still tends to try at first to see things romantically: "It's an Arabian Night, that's what it is...I'm in Damascus or Grand Cairo. The Marchioness is a Genie, and having had a wager with another Genie about who is the handsomest young man alive,

and the worthiest to be the husband of the Princess of China..." (104). The Marchioness claps her hands with delight when she hears him speak as she realises that he has recovered. "Arabian Night, certainly," Dick thinks, "they always clap their hands instead of ringing the bell. Now for the two thousand black slaves, with jars of jewels on their heads." (105). When he begs the small servant to tell him what she knows about the Brasses, he still uses stage dialogue: "Speak, sister, speak," he says (106).

Once he has the full details of the treachery of Brass and Quilp he acts like a tiger. He now sees things clearer than ever before, the mists of poetry are dispelled and he tells Mr. Abel the whole terrible story "without any deviation or omission." (107). After his change of heart Dick is basically a different man. When we first met him he was fully committed to the city group, he was an understudy for Brass or Quilp, a follower of sophisticated city fashions and ways, guided by financial interest, an enemy of Kit, one who could not really see Nell for what she was. He managed to keep himself from full and real involvement in life by protecting himself behind a veil of romantic-poetic self-deception. His contact with the Marchioness, his realisation of what people like Quilp and the Brasses are involved in, all these various inter-laced experiences change him. Significantly he now allies with the country: he inherits a legacy from his aunt "Rebecca Swiveller, spinster, deceased, of Cheselbourne in Dorsetshire." (108). When he marries the Marchioness they live in "a little cottage at Hampstead...which had in its garden a smoking-box, the envy

of the civilised world... To this retreat Mr. Chuckster repaired regularly every Sunday to spend the day..." (109). Having always been "in some measure of a philosophic and reflective turn" he now grows "immensely contemplative" and that is the last we see of Richard Swiveller. (110).

The last group of figures to examine do not require much space; Kit and the Garlands, the forces of good in the story play an important part in the whole. The Garlands are particularly associated with the country. Kit and his mother and brothers and Barbara stand for those important family qualities which are obsessive in Dickens' imagination. We unconsciously compare Kit's family life with the bitter squabbling menage of Quilp. Kit is one of the constant number of seemingly grotesque and idiotic characters in Dickens who hide behind an unnatural and droll exterior a heart of gold. A goodness not of this world, and their standards of behaviour and morality are not of this world either. Kit at first seems to be an object of amusement for Nell and the narrator (111) but we should note that he generates good humour. We note also his real attachment to Nell. (112). I do not think it is accidental that Kit's being taught to write by Nell should so strongly remind us of Joe Gargery's similarly difficult and strenuous attempts at calligraphy. (113). A mark of the unmistakable goodness of Kit is the way that Quilp instinctively hates him.

Dickens stresses the fact that although the Nubbles family all look very alike and are in consequence not prepossessing, they are a good family: "It was rather a queer-looking family"

he tells us (114) but they have that love and unity so lacking in the Quilp household and which is absent in Trent's family. Effort has to be made in a poor home, because of the discomfort and endless hard work which always accompanies poverty, but they make the effort to be good-humoured: "Kit was disposed to be out of temper, as the best of us are too often - but he looked at the youngest child who was sleeping soundly, and from him to his other brother in the clothes basket, and from him to their mother, who had been at work without complaint since morning, and thought it would be a better and kinder thing to be good-humoured. So he rocked the cradle with his foot, made a face at the rebel in the clothes basket..." (115). The simple things of life - beer, bread, meat - are what they live on: we are meant to contrast this with Swiveller and Fred Trent's dream world of high living and sophisticated company and with Old Trent's dream of making Nell a lady. The Nubbles family are content, but not complacent. Kit makes it his duty every night to watch the street to see that no harm comes to Nell. He is in love with her, of course. Like Edgar, innocent Kit is banished - from the curiosity shop, by old Trent. (116).

He is later to suffer even more, at the same hands as had him dismissed from Trent's. Kit had said that Quilp was "an uglier dwarf than could be seen anywhere for a penny." Quilp tells Old Trent that it was Kit who had revealed to him the secret of Trent's poverty. Trent forbids him to come to the shop any more. Yet it is Kit who comes to comfort Nell when Grandfather is ill (117), and who offers Old Trent and the child hospitality when they fall into the hands of Quilp:

"You think...that it's very small and inconvenient. So it is, but it's very clean. Perhaps you think it would be noisy, but there's not a quieter court than ours in all the town. Don't be afraid of the children; the baby hardly ever cries, and the other one is very good - besides I'd mind 'em... We don't mean money...you're not to think of that..." (118). We contrast that with all the people Nell is to meet on her travels who hope to gain money from her - the card-sharpers, Codlin and Short, Mrs. Jarley. The emblem associated throughout the novel with Kit's goodness of heart is the laugh, which we know Dickens went to a great deal of trouble to establish on our imagination (119). He is not sentimental "and perhaps had never heard that adjective in all his life. He was only a soft-hearted grateful fellow, and had nothing genteel or polite about him..." (120).

It is only natural that Kit should meet up with the Garlands, who are the other representatives from the camp of the good. We should note their name with its associations of flowers and good-will. (121). Mr. Garland has a club foot, a recollection of Hephaestus and Vulcan and a symbol of skill, subtlety and kindness. We should note the natural, unspoilt "naughtiness" of his pony, Whisker, a natural, playful and lively country animal. Their son Abel, has a "quaint old-fashioned air about him" (122), and he too has a club foot (123). Kit has held the pony cart while Mr. and Mrs. Garland are in the office of Mr. Witherden the Notary, to whom Abel is articulated. Garland has no change and is therefore compelled to give Kit a shilling, which he thinks is too much, so he asks Kit to be at the same place next week. Kit is there. It is

important evidence of Kit's character that he spends the money on his family. Kit is associated with the natural untarnished vitality of animals: "Can you suppose there's any harm in looking as cheerful and being as cheerful as our poor circumstances will permit?" he asks his mother (124). "...Just hear this! Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as a sheep's bleating, or a pig's grunting, or a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing?..." We naturally tend to bracket him with Nell, his female counterpart, who is also associated with the pure, unspoilt world of nature and of the animals. Kit's laugh is infectious, it makes his mother laugh and wakes the baby "who, finding that there was something very jovial and agreeable in progress, no sooner in its mother's arms than it began to kick and laugh... and a very cheerful meal their scanty supper was." (125). He is taken into the employ of Mr. Garland as a servant.

The description of the Garland house at Finchley which the novelist gives us is very important. Once again the simple unspoilt elements are stressed, and animals and birds - all this in obvious contrast to the sordid grime of the city life: "...it was a beautiful little cottage with a thatched roof... On one side of the house was a little stable, just the size for the pony, with a little room over it just the size for Kit. White curtains were fluttering, and birds, in ages that looked as bright as if they were made of gold, were singing at the windows; plants were arranged on either side of the path, and clustered about the door; and the garden was bright with flowers in full bloom..." (125). The selected details here bespeak purity, growth, wholesomeness, innocence, brightness

and peace. In the garden "there was not a weed to be seen." (127). It is a fairy-tale cottage, a dwelling of purity and good. As Kit waits outside he thinks "about giants' castles, and princesses...and dragons bursting out from behind gates..." (128). The door is opened by "a little servant girl, very tidy, modest and demure, but very pretty too..." (129). Kit and the pony get on very well, right from the start (130) and this is additional evidence of his goodness. "There's the pony, Sir," Kit says, "... (and he knows so well I'm talking about him that he begins to neigh directly...) would he let anybody come near him but me, ma'am? Here's the garden, Sir, and Mr. Abel, ma'am...is there anybody that could be fonder of the garden, ma'am?..." (131). The reception of Kit in the Garland household is celebrated with a meal of "cold meat, and small ale" (132).

The food is humble but wholesome food. It is an obvious contrast to the evil and violent diet of Quilp. Barbara sits there shelling peas. We feel the continuity of simple, loving family life, the novelist is here making the same point about the virtues of domestic life as he does in the scene at the Nubbles' home in Chapter 38 (133). We also note how readily Kit learns domestic duties, gardening and stabling (134). It is important to note how Mr. Chuckster, symbol as he is of the fashionable city world, fails to establish any relationship with the pony, though he does threaten to "break him" (135). Kit and Barbara have their first quarter day's holiday together. I must say that the scene where they receive their wages, with so much humility, and Barbara's mother says "Here's a blessing

you, ma'am, as a good lady, and you Sir, as a good gentleman..." to the Garlands (136) is a trifle embarrassing today, although here I do not think Dickens really deserves the strictures he sometimes has for his treatment of working class characters (137). We should note that this is not simply undeserved humility, a formalisation of a virtue (138) but that tribute is paid where it is due, because the Garlands are good people.

Kit spends his money on his family and they all go out to the theatre. As is so often the case with Dickens, the theatre is associated with all that is warm and vital. "Dear, dear, what a place it looked, that Astley's! with all the paint, gilding and looking-glass; the vague smell of horses suggestive of coming wonders; the curtain that hid such gorgeous mysteries, the clean white sawdust down in the circus... What a glow was that which burst upon them all, when that long, clear, brilliant row of lights came slowly up..." (139). It is a commonplace of criticism that Dickens was very attached to the theatre (140). What is important here is to understand what the theatre meant for Dickens and what we are to see in the Nubbles' association with playgoing. The main point, I think is that for the novelist the theatre stood for what was lively, warm, cheerful and rational. Dickens opened an article in Household Words by saying "There are not many things of which the English as a people stand in greater need than sound rational amusement. As a necessary element in any popular education worthy of the name; as a wholesome incentive to the fancy, depressed by the business of life; as a rest and relief from realities which are not and never can be all-sufficient for the

mind, - sound rational public amusement is very much to be desired." (141).

The theatre brings to Kit what Dr. Leavis, in discussing the contrast drawn between the circus and Stone Lodge in Hard Times, has described as representative of human spontaneity and skills which "have no value for the Utilitarian calculus." (142) Dickens was intensely devoted to the need for keeping alive the fancy in a world which he felt was daily growing more indifferent to the spirit and the imagination. The need he felt particularly with reference to young people. (143). Astley's theatre would have provided an ample and varied fare. It was a theatre in Westminster Bridge Road which we know Dickens himself frequented when younger. Here one could see clowns, acrobats, horseriding (144), melodrama, and solo turns (145).

The Nubbles had a fine entertainment: "...the horses which little Jacob believed from the first to be alive...the firing, which made Barbara wink - the forlorn lady, who made her cry - the tyrant, who made her tremble - the man who sang the song with the lady's maid and danced the chorus, who made her laugh, - the pony who reared up on his hind legs when he saw the murderer, and wouldn't hear of walking on all fours again until he was taken into custody...everything was delightful, splendid, and surprising. Little Jacob applauded until his hands were sore; Kit cried 'an-kor' at everything...and Barbara's mother beat her umbrella on the floor..." (146). Much of this is really autobiographical: he seems to be giving Kit a night out such as he enjoyed as a young man. (147).

Kit is persistently associated with what is good, pure and innocent: like Nell he is directly linked with the sun, "Full of that vague kind of penitence which holidays awaken, Kit turned out at sunrise..." (148). In him Dickens continues and develops the theme of the persecution of the innocent which runs through Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, is present in the treatment of Barnaby Rudge, of Nell, Tiny Tim, Paul Dombey and the early life of David Copperfield. We should carefully observe the treatment he is given by his employer, Mr. Garland. The old gentleman really gives him good advice about his career and his prospects. He does not exploit him, quite the contrary (149). Here is contrasted the way in which most of the adults Nell meets attempt to exploit her for gain. Kit is an ideal victim for the guile and villainy of Brass and Quilp. He is only saved by the change of heart in Richard Swiveller and the expertise of the Marchioness. Dickens uses Kit to stand as a symbol for the unjust treatment of the pure which he finds typical of the world: "...it is very questionable whether a guilty man would have felt half as much misery...as Kit did, being innocent. The world, being in a constant commission of vast quantities of injustice, is a little too apt to comfort itself with the idea that if the victim of its falsehood and malice have a clear conscience, he cannot fail to be sustained under his trials... Whereas the world would do well to reflect, that injustice is in itself...an injury, of all others the most insufferable, the most torturing..." (150). When he is released, he returns to the world of "Lighted rooms, bright fires, cheerful faces, the music of glad voices...warm hearts..." (151). He knew that the Garlands, his own family,

Barbara and the pony would be disillusioned if they thought he was really guilty; now that he is exonerated he returns to them all. He establishes contact with the pony again, who neighs to see him "mad to give him welcome" (152). The pony rubs his nose against his coat "and fondles him more lovingly than ever pony fondled man..." (153). We are witnessing here yet again that immense bond and sympathy that instinctively exists between animals and the innocent.

The story is now nearly at an end. The single gentleman is revealed as old Trent's brother. He has come to help them. Retribution catches up with Quilp. Brass is exposed. Kit is too late, when the fugitives are found Nell is already dead: "Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born... And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change... She was dead, and past all help, or need of it. The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life...the garden she had tended - the eyes she had gladdened - the noiseless haunts of many a thoughtful hour - the paths she had trodden as it were but yesterday - could know her no more." (154).

In so many ways The Old Curiosity Shop is an unsatisfying performance, repititious, garbled, crude and yet somehow its effect is still a powerful one: it reads like a jumbled trailer for Dickens' later novels. Set against a background of social disturbance and change, financial recklessness on a national scale, human indifference to all but the profit motive, how strongly the archetypal figures act out their symbolic drama:

the deranged grandfather who ruins himself and destroys his child, the suffering innocents, the socially pretentious people, the good, the kind, the simple, the grasping and the evil: the contrast between what the world was - peaceful, communal and generous - and what it was to become, busy, inhuman and industrial. Using the symbol of the stars, Dickens shows us that the world we live in is indifferent to us.

When Nell and Grandfather are fleeing from their persecutors, one evening Nell raises "her eyes to the bright stars, looking down so mildly from the wide worlds of air, and gazing on them, found new stars burst upon her view, and more beyond, and more beyond again, until the whole great expanse sparkled with shining spheres, rising higher and higher in immeasurable space, eternal in their numbers... She bent over the calm river, and saw them shining in the same majestic order as when the dove behind them gleaming through the swollen waters, upon the mountain tops down far below, and dead mankind, a million fathoms deep." (155). We know the novelist to have been particularly careful about this passage and to have been quite satisfied with the result. He wrote to Forster on the 4th October 1840: "You will receive the proof herewith. I have altered it. You must let it stand now, I really think the dead mankind a million fathoms deep, the best thing in the sentence. I have a notion of the dreadful silence down there, and of the stars shining through upon their drowned eyes - the fruit, let me tell you of a solitary walk by starlight on the cliffs..." (156). The effect on Nell is to make her think less of hope than of resignation. (157).

Night, the moon and the stars are an associated group of images which foretell wasting and death. "In the pale moon-light, which lent a wanness of its own, the delicate face where thoughtful care already mingled with winning grace and loveliness of youth, the too bright eye, the spiritual head...the slight figure firm in its bearing and yet so very weak, told their silent tale...faint dreams of childhood fading in its bloom, and resting in the sleep that knows no waking. The night crept on apace, the moon went down, the stars grew pale and dim..." (158). The symbol of the stars, of the indifference of the heavens or the lack of hope for any intervention, we find continued and developed in Barnaby Rudge. When Kit is on the way to reach Nell and Grandfather, oblivious of the child's death, we find the last reference to the cold stars in the novel: "All day long it blew without cessation. The night was clear and starlight...and the cold was piercing..." (159). It is already too late.

Part of the effectiveness of The Old Curiosity Shop, and something which in very large measure compensates its apparent lack of formal organisation, is its dream-like quality, noted by critics (160). Master Humphrey goes home to bed after meeting Nell for the first time, and dreams of the child: "I had ever before me the old dark murky rooms...and alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the beautiful child, in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams." (161). As Old Trent leaves her at night - we later discover he goes to play at cards for money - he tells her that he'll be home early in the morning. "You'll not ring

twice," Nell tells him, "the bell wakes me, even in the middle of a dream." (162). The idea of the dream acts as a linking motive throughout the novel. Trent assures Quilp that he is bound to win soon: "...I have never felt it half so strongly as I feel it now. Quilp, I have dreamed three nights of winning the same large sum, I never could dream that dream before, though I have often tried. Do not desert me now I have this chance..." (163). Realising what he has done to their lives, Trent begs Nell to forgive him: "All that is past, all that has come upon thee, Nell, all that was done in that uneasy dream..." (164). He looks forward to a future when all this will be forgotten: "...we will travel afoot through fields and woods... It is far better to lie down at night beneath an open sky...than to rest in close rooms which are always full of care and weary dreams..." (165). As Nell's anxieties about her grandfather's behaviour increase "her heart was oppressed and heavy. All her old sorrows had come back upon her, augmented by new fears and doubts; by day they were ever present to her mind; by night they hovered round her pillow, and haunted her in dreams." (166). These fears intensify until the moment when she begs Old Trent to fly from the temptations of gambling after he has fallen in with Isaac List and the gipsies. Her fears are personified in dreams: "I have had a dreadful dream... A dreadful horrible dream... It is dream of grey-haired men like you, in darkened rooms by night, robbing the sleepers of their gold... This dream is too real! I cannot sleep...I cannot leave you alone under the roof where such dreams come... Tomorrow night will be too late. The dream will have to come again..." (167). The dread of this dream she urges as an

excuse to continue their flight. Trent demands to know why she keeps making him move on to new places: "I cannot bear these close eternal streets. We came from a quiet part. Why did you force me to leave it?" Nell answers: "Because I must have that dream I told you of, no more...and we must live among poor people, or it will come again..." (168). Lodging in the premises of the good old schoolmaster she sleeps well and peacefully and has "a sweet and happy dream." (169). Tending the flowers in the churchyard Old Trent looks on the past weeks as better gone. "Much better", rejoins Nell, "We will forget them; or if we ever call them to mind, it shall be only as some uneasy dream that has passed away." "Hush!" said the old man, "...no more talk of the dream, and all the miseries it brought. There are no dreams here. 'Tis a quiet place, and they keep away..." (170). When the child's end is approaching old Trent begs them not to "waken" her. (171). Her whole life seems to have been a dream, and she wakes in the next world: "...as the hours crept on, she sank to sleep. They could tell, by what she faintly uttered in her dreams, that they were of her journeyings with the old man; they were of no painful scenes, but of those who had helped and used them kindly... Waking, she never wandered in her mind but once, and that was of beautiful music which she said was in the air..." (172). They look upon her face when she is dead: "...it had passed like a dream through haunts of misery and care..." (173). Trent dreams that she will be "restored to them, just as she used to be." (174). The whole story has this strange dream-like quality and is rounded with a sleep: the Cattermole illustration at the end of the first number had been called "The Child in her

Gentle Slumber" and the companion picture at the end of the novel was called "At Rest".

There is then a very marked dreamy-romantic quality about The Old Curiosity Shop, which makes it at once truly typical of its author and of its period. We know that Dickens was very fond of romantic writing. (175). Like a dream, the story of The Old Curiosity Shop has a meaning, there is a tension between what Professor Taylor Stoehr calls the apparent and the hidden meanings. (176). Much of The Old Curiosity Shop seems to generate the ambiguous world of the dream, in Professor Stoehr's words, where order and meaning are directed by unconscious needs and purposes, and - like a dream - the effect of the story is deep and impressive. But what does it tell us? Once again it is the dream-like quality which makes it hard to grasp in its essence what the novelist wanted to say; but after reflection it seems clear enough: although the tone of much of the book is directed towards acceptance, complacency, there is a strong and uncompromising rejection of certain assumptions and attitudes. As Walter Scott said of The Vicar of Wakefield, which, as I have suggested, was a strong influence in this book, it "contrives so well to reconcile us to human nature." (177). A great deal has happened to Dickens since he wrote Pickwick. He had written in the Preface to the original edition of Pickwick Papers that if any of his imperfect descriptions "while they afford amusement...should induce only one reader to think better of his fellow men, and to look upon the brighter and more kindly side of human nature, he would be proud and happy to have led to such a result." (178). Dickens' personal experiences, and

observations of the way life was going in the society he lived in, have now darkened that sunny view.

The Old Curiosity Shop is like sunshine and rain at once: the good characters are balanced by the evil characters. The villains are not just occasional pieces of comic relief, they are now part of the stuff of life. Has the book a happy ending? "The light streamed through...the coloured window - a window, where the boughs of trees were ever rustling in the summer, and where the birds sang sweetly all day long. With every breath of air that stirred among those branches in the sunshine, some trembling, changing light would fall upon her grave..." (179). Does that really affirm the values of life? Or has a weak human child been a sorry victim of man's greed and stupidity? I sense that Dickens' faith in the optimistic resolution of human affairs was now seriously eroded. Even Kit becomes to forget where Nell lived, the house is pulled down, a new road is built: "Such are the changes which a few years bring about, and so do things pass away, like a tale that is told." (180).

The general effect of The Old Curiosity Shop is inconclusive and jumbled: it is powerful - there is no doubt about that - but to what end? The sum of its parts is somehow greater than the whole. It is probably a mistake to make too great a claim for the stature of this novel, (181) but, I think, it is equally a mistake too lightly to dismiss it. It might not be a better "novel" than Oliver Twist or Nicholas Nickleby, but it is undoubtedly better Dickens. (182).

CHAPTER SEVEN -----

THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD OF "BARNABY RUDGE"

"I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burned down Lord Mansfield's, and played the very devil. Another number will finish the fires... I feel quite smoky when I'm at work..."

Dickens to Forster, 18th September 1841.

"...if Wat Tyler and his followers when their passions were once let loose, had burnt down the City and got drunk with blood, I should still entertain some respect for their memory."

Dickens to John Overs, 30th November 1840.

In an extremely interesting section of the book Dickens at Work Kathleen Tillotson discusses the background and composition of this novel. As she rightly points out, it is an unusual book in the Dickens oeuvre because of the long period of its gestation and the very detailed historical research he needed to work up the subject of the Gordon Riots. The main reasons she gives for Dickens' embarking on this novel are the wish to imitate Scott, his fascination with Newgate - both as place and symbol - his being stirred by the suggestion that the inmates of Bedlam were to be released during the riots, the parallels with the fall of the Bastille, the topicality of the Poor Law riots, Chartist risings, the question of criminal responsibility and degrees of insanity (the relationship between madness, crime and revolutionarism), the pressure of capital punishment and public execution on the conscience of the thoughtful, Dickens' fears of Protestant bigotry (the Protestant Association was newly founded in 1839) are among the most probable themes conscious in Dickens' mind. (1). She concludes "Barnaby, then, is related to the events and mood of the exact years of its writing and publication." (2). But to establish this case, we have got to demonstrate beyond any doubt that these themes were present in Dickens' mind when he wrote this work. Professor Tillotson has elsewhere stressed the very historical qualities of Barnaby Rudge. (3).

The claim that Dickens wrote Barnaby in an attempt directly to imitate Walter Scott has frequently been made. The novel usually cited as a source is The Heart of Midlothian, based on the Porteus riots of 1736. It is an obvious parallel, but not

easy to substantiate. The association of Dickens' Barnaby Rudge and Scott's The Heart of Midlothian so readily claimed by Edgar Johnson, Jack Lindsay, O.A.J. Cockshut and the authors of Dickens at Work (4) is not really supported by the evidence. Scott's novel contains a description of a riot, so does Barnaby Rudge, and there, I think, the resemblance ends. I think the differences are far more significant.

The riot scenes in Scott occupy only a couple of chapters. The riot scenes here appear at the beginning of the novel and are in no way climactic in the structure of the novel, but only a piece of "historic colour" and a convenient way of fitting in Robertson's attempted rescue of Effie Deans. These scenes, unlike the riot scenes in Barnaby Rudge, are not central to the action of the novel. The rioters are orderly, Scott insists on this several times and even refers to the evidence of members of his own family in support of this. "A near relation of the author's used to tell of having been stopped by the rioters, and escorted home in the manner described. On reaching her own home, one of her attendants...handed her out of her chair, and took leave with a bow..." (5). The rioters, once they have performed their object (the hanging of Porteus) then disperse: "Certain it was, that the sudden and total dispersion of the rioters, when their vindictive purpose was accomplished, seemed not the least remarkable feature of this singular affair." (6). We note again, that this is quite otherwise in Barnaby, where the gathering of the mob leads to violence, wanton rioting, orgies, destruction and arson. Scott is quite explicit about this: "In general, whatever may be the impelling motive by

which a mob is at first raised, the attainment of their object, has usually been only found to lead the way to further excesses. But not so in the present case." (7). Above all, there is no vivid imagery or symbolism in Scott's treatment of the riots. The only similarity seems to be the Porteus rioters' use of fire to effect an entry to the Tolbooth. (8). Otherwise the Porteus rioters, in Scott's novel, go about their business with a deportment, seriousness and sense of purpose which quite puts Gordon's mob to shame. The debt to Scott has been overstressed, with little evidence to support it. (9).

Bulwer Lytton thought that Barnaby Rudge was "too Scott-like" (10) but he did not specify The Heart of Midlothian. We know that Dickens was interested in Scott, and visited Scott's houses when he went to Scotland in 1841, during the actual composition of Barnaby (11). Dickens read a great deal of Scott (12). We know that Dickens took Scott's literary labours as a warning (13), but we have not got the vital evidence we would need categorically to prove that Dickens set out to imitate The Heart of Midlothian, namely, a discussion of this novel in his recorded correspondence. For all Ainsworth's insistence that Dickens was Scott's real successor (14) we do not have that clinching piece of evidence which would place this discussion undisputably beyond conjecture.

Of Dickens' interest in prisons, and Newgate in particular, we have more evidence (15). He was interested in Newgate as a subject for writing about from the very earliest part of his career (16) and frequently visited prisons at home and abroad. (17)

He seems to have read quite widely on the subject of penology (18). In his interest in Newgate as a subject for fiction he was really only following the so-called "Newgate School" eventually mocked by Thackeray in Catherine. (19).

Of Bedlam I cannot find a single reference in the letters of 1840-1841, nor in Forster or Johnson, in any way relevant to the actual period of the composition of Barnaby Rudge. Nor is there any direct reference to the Bastille; consequently the supposition that in the burning and destruction of Newgate, Dickens is really symbolising the storming of the Bastille, is based only on inference. The inference is obvious enough, but the direct portrayal of the Bastille scenes in A Tale of Two Cities does not really furnish evidence to conclude that this is what Dickens had in mind in Barnaby Rudge. (20). Of Dickens' interest in the Poor Laws there is little evidence during the composition of Barnaby. (21). Capital punishment, and the effects of hanging on tender consciences, did not really become a major concern of the novelist's until the mid 1840's (22). He saw the murderer Courvoisier hanged in July 1841, this was during the composition of Barnaby, but it is likely that Dennis the hangman and the scenes of execution were firmly in Dickens' mind before the Courvoisier crime, that is to say, Dickens was not directly inspired by this crime and execution. (23). In fact from Dickens' letters it seems as if he was more interested in Courvoisier's trial and his defence. (24). There are sparse references to the would-be assassin of Queen Victoria: of the deranged seventeen year old, Oxford, who fired at the Queen on June 10th 1840, we know Dickens thought he was brimful of

conceit and only seeking notoriety in order to be the talk of the town: Dickens believed he should have been quietly suffocated between two mattresses. (25). The evidence that the novelist was influenced by contemporary crimes is very slender.

References to Protestant bigotry are well documented in the letters, but they post date the inception of Barnaby Rudge. The late summer of 1841 brought a rash of anti-dissenting comment in the press, but Dickens was working on the novel months before this time. By February 1840 he had completed the first two chapters, which - when revised - gave him the material for Chapters I - III. (26). In January 1841 he reworked this material, and brought his work to Chapter IV. The first weekly instalment of the novel appeared on February 13th 1841. Each issue consisted of two chapters, and by the middle of September he was still working a few weeks ahead. (27). The anti-Protestant articles no doubt referred to by Kathleen Tillotson began to appear in the second and third weeks of August, when the Gordon riots sections were at their height. This would have brought Dickens to Chapter LIV, which opens "Rumours of the prevailing disturbances had by this time begun to be pretty generally circulated..."

To prove a link between the anti-Protestantism in the air (or, at least, in the press) and the composition of Barnaby Rudge, we should have to be able to demonstrate that Dickens could have read the attacks on the Dissenters as "Quakers" and "Jews" who were conspiring to enrich themselves, the enemies of the farmers, the poor and of religion, which appeared in The Age

for August 22nd 1841. (28). But unfortunately Miss Miggs and Mr. Varden, as well as the leaders of the Protestant Association were all thoroughly characterised by Dickens months before the time when the articles were published.

It is, I believe, a mistake to try too closely to relate Dickens' obvious hatred of extreme Protestantism to this press campaign. We have the early evidence of his polemic pamphlet Sunday Under Three Heads (1836) an attack on proposed legislation to forbid Sunday recreation as well as labour. This is a dark thread which runs right through his work. I personally think he hits it off best in the sections on "the Murdstone religion" in David Copperfield: "...which was austere and wrathful...I well remember the tremendous visages with which we used to go to church... Again the dreaded Sunday comes round, and I file into the old pew...like a guarded captive brought to a condemned service...Miss Murdstone, in a black velvet gown, that looks as if it had been made out of a pall, follows close upon me; then my mother; then her husband... I listen to Miss Murdstone mumbling the responses, and emphasising all the dread words with a cruel relish...I see her dark eyes roll round the church when she says 'miserable sinners', as if she were calling all the congregation names..." (29). The coincidence of feeling in Barnaby Rudge and the newspaper articles is remarkable, there is no question of that. The Morning Post of August 20th called them "hypocrites and atheists" and The Times of the same date also attacked them. The Argus of August 14th and 21st headlined "the Firebrands of Dissent" and ended their editorial on August 21st "And once more, thank

God that we have the CHURCH OF ENGLAND." Dickens wrote to Macready on the 24th of August: "How Abraham must be smoothing his etherial robes, to make a warm place in his bosom for the Protestant champions of this time. What a joy in Holy Heaven when the angels look down on Sunday mornings, and read in bright blue letters that Mr. Westmacott (proprietor and editor of The Age) takes their part! Fancy The Standard, and The Morning Post, The Age, The Argus - The Times - all on the side of Christ. Celestial host!" (30). The Protestant Association re-formed in 1839, and the suicide of Robert Watson, Gordon's Secretary, in 1838 at the age of eighty-two (a possible original of Gashford) were widely publicised; but, as we have seen, Barnaby Rudge was projected some years before these events. The apparent relation between the press campaign against Protestants and scenes in the novel does not prove a direct influence, even if it does not deny Dickens' prescience. (31). But I do not think the direct relevance of the religious movements of 1839 and the following months should be pushed too far: the novel was well projected before the Protestant Association began its campaign, and the finest anti-Protestant sections of Barnaby Rudge were written and blotted months before the first reports appeared in The Age.

Throughout the eighteen forties religion continued to be a source of faction and animosity in political, as well as social life (32), and in making a religious issue the basis for such severe - and violent - social and public dissent Dickens seems to be as much historically accurate about the 1780's as the 1840's.

class representation in Parliament which...came to a crisis in 1840." (48). There are several aspects of this assumption which need careful consideration. The first is that the novelist had in mind to write Barnaby Rudge before Chartism, as a social disturbance, made itself felt. Barnaby was promised to the publishers as early as 1836 (49), and was originally intended to follow Oliver Twist (50). For various reasons its publication was delayed. The most fundamental reason was probably his disillusionment with his publishers (51). He wrote to Bentley: "It is no fiction to say that at present I cannot write this tale. The immense profits which Oliver has realised to its publisher and is still realising; the paltry, wretched, miserable sum it brought to me...puts me out of heart and spirits..." (52). Even when he did settle down to work on it, work went very slowly. "Thank God, all goes famously," he wrote, "I have worked at Barnaby all day...(it) moves, not at racehorse speed, but yet as fast (I think) as under these unsettled circumstances could possibly be expected ...Barnaby has reached its tenth page..." (53).

He seems only to have got into a reasonable stride with this work by the opening weeks of 1841; by February 22nd he was into the second number of the novel, but found he had to force himself to work on it: "I didn't stir out yesterday, but sat and thought all day; not writing a line...I imagined forth a good deal of Barnaby by keeping my mind steadily upon him... Last night I was unutterably and impossible-to-form-an-idea-of-ably miserable..." he wrote in the last days of February, (54) and by April he wrote that he was getting on

"very slowly" (55). He finished it on 2nd November 1841 (56). As Professor Tillotson and the late John Butt so thoroughly demonstrated (57) Dickens had this work in mind for many months; of all his works it probably had the longest period of gestation. He had hoped in the first place to have it completed and in the publisher's hands by 30th November 1836. (58). He found writing for weekly instalments cramping, but was fired by the middle chapters (59), and it is obvious that the centrality of the treatment of the actual riots was a feature of the work from its earliest inception. (60). But it is also to stress the fact that Barnaby Rudge was conceived and projected during the decade following the struggles to achieve the passing of the First Reform Bill, at a time when the general feeling of this Bill's inadequacy merged with other economic and social grievances; I am referring to the sad state of English agriculture and the public resentment at the harshness of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

There does seem to be a strong case for arguing that the background of Barnaby Rudge is the fear of mob politics. (61). The period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until well into the second half of the nineteenth century was a time when revolution seemed imminent. The end of the war brought an end to the boom in many industries involved in the war effort, and slackening of production brought unemployment. The ranks of the unemployed were swelled by the returning sailors and soldiers. Discontent and hardship showed itself in riots and disturbances: (62) Spa Fields, Peterloo, the Blanketeers, the Cato Street Conspiracy. (63). The Combination Law of 1824

seemed to usher in a year of strikes and industrial disturbances (64).

The Peace of Vienna (1815) brought an end to the artificial prosperity of the farmers, and a drastic decline in agricultural prices followed. Wheat slumped to 65/7d. a quarter in that year. The less efficient farmers were ruined. Difficulties were increased by a series of bad harvests. Many farms were abandoned and much land changed from arable land to pasture. Farmers in the Midlands suffered particularly as heavy clay land was less suitable for the obvious alternative crops, such as turnips of four course rotation, heavy land like this required more labour and horse power, and better drainage. They were thus costly to the farmer, and to this must be added the sad fact that crops like this were also subject to failure. There were several agricultural riots in the eighteen thirties. In December of that year nine hundred labourers were arrested (65). Lord Melbourne took a hard line on these disturbances and circulated a letter to Justices of the Peace urging them to exert all the authorities in their power to suppress them. Almost immediately it was being said of Melbourne that he was the one strong man in the government. (66). In three months he had it cleared up, by using soldiers and a special commission of judges with powers of immediate trial, by treating the symptoms and not the disease, all agitation was ended (67). Four hundred and fifty labourers were transported (68). The infamous Corn Law of 1815 (repealed, to the ruin of his career and almost of his party by Sir Robert Peel in 1846) was passed to protect the landed minority. It was in the main ineffective, and promoted rising opposition of the industrially minded middle

classes. The worst of this depression in agriculture did not pass until the early eighteen forties. (69).

Manufacturing areas also showed symptoms of disorder. Cornwall and Wales experienced bad strikes (70), and at Manchester there was a particularly serious strike of cotton spinners during which a manufacturer's son was murdered (71). There was real fear of Revolution. The French Revolution was fresh in the imagination, and the threat of a public rising was re-awakened by the Revolution in July 1830 which brought Louis Philippe to power. The French Revolution had started with an agricultural rising and had culminated in mobs at Paris. The London Radicals campaigned for reform and to their efforts were added various acts of lawlessness in the country districts. The Poor Law Amendment Act was rushed through to end the system of outdoor relief which those in power thought contributed to the spirit of unrest (72). "...Before spring all Europe will be in war..." wrote Sir William Napier to his wife, "here in London men speak sedition openly in the clubs, and secretly in the streets... Public opinion is...ripe for a revolution..." (73). Wellington had stated that he opposed all further reform and that he did not care who knew it (74), and there were anti-Wellington demonstrations. The form these assemblies took is significant. On 9th November 1831 there was a riotous assembly near Blackfriars Bridge, there were Jacobin speeches and tricolours wildly displayed. There were political clubs, on the model of the Birmingham Political Union, springing up all over the kingdom. Tricolour banners were displayed at meetings in Staffordshire (75). "After the events in France," a modern

historian comments, "English agitation for reform assumed a revolutionary character which no-one could mistake." (76). There had already been a frightening omen in the march of some 10,000 skilled men, headed by tricolours, to besiege St. James's Palace. (77). Dickens was a young reporter on the gallery of the House of Commons when one of the most horrid political riots took place, in Bristol.

The Lords threw out the Reform Bill, Sir Charles Wetherell (1770-1846) voting against it. Wetherell was not popular in Bristol and some have ascribed the Bristol Riot to his lack of support in the city (78). In the city of Bath, for example, the failure of the Bill would mean that 38,000 people would continue to be represented in Parliament by a Member elected by the Corporation of thirty, nearly half of whom became members of the Corporation by purchasing the freedom of the city for two hundred and fifty guineas. (79). The citizens of Bath and Bristol rose to vent their anger against the Lords and the Recorder. Two thousand assembled on the common at Compton Dando, and similar gatherings at Bradford-on-Avon, Bridgewater, Corsham, and Salisbury demanded that the Bill become law. When the unfortunate Wetherell attempted to enter Bristol on November 3rd 1831 he was met by demonstrators. A riot ensued, involving arson, destruction and killing. The County Jail, Bishop's Palace, Customs House, many houses in Queen Square and Little King Street were burned. Special constables and dragoons were called out, and over a hundred were killed and wounded. Keenes Bath Journal reports that some thirty rioters were trapped and burned in the Custom House. Three hundred

Constables were needed to keep down a similar riot in Bath.(80).

It is not without significance, particularly so when considering the religious aspects of Barnaby Rudge, that much of the public's anger was turned on the clerics. This was so because it was widely known that the Bishops in the Lords had opposed the Reform Bill. The burning of the Bishop's Palace in Bristol, then, may be seen as an act of retribution (81). It was feared that the people were arming and King William IV was ready to leave the country, as he believed he might lose his head (82). There had been political riots in Derby, with loss of life, and Nottingham Castle, owned by the hated Duke of Newcastle, was burned to the ground (83). The dissatisfaction of the people showed itself in more enterprising ways. It was decided to set up a democratically elected Convention, to meet in London, which would rival the "middle class parliament" at Westminster. The government prohibited such meetings, and this resulted in the riot of 1833 known as the Battle of Calthorpe Street (84). Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trade Union intended to call for a national, general strike all over the country. The movement was really annihilated by Lord Melbourne, who made a classic example of the Six Men of Dorset (85). Even The Times felt moved to comment on the unfairness of the sentences given to the Tolpuddle Martyrs: "the crimes which called for punishment were not proved, the crime brought home to the prisoners did not justify the sentence..." (86). The obvious pathos and drama of the story of the Dorset Labourers has overshadowed other examples of unrest and oppression which indicate the general social and industrial malaise of the

time: in Derby and Leeds there was civil disturbance, Combination Delegates were arrested in Exeter (87). The dreadful effects of the 1834 Poor Law, coupled with the economic instability of the time were all fomenting before being given a focal point in Chartism.

Chartism was in many respects a bread and butter question: a contemporary newspaper carries the report of a meeting at Manchester in August 1839, where the Chartists tried to put into effect their plan for a stoppage of work, a "National Holiday". They visited mills and factories at the hour for starting work and before being prevented by the police these efforts were effective in about twenty places of work. "One of the parties walked in procession, headed by a band of music and a man carrying a banner, having upon it the cap of liberty, with the inscriptions 'The earth the right of man' and 'He that will not work, neither shall he eat'." (88). And at St. Stephen's Church in the same month some 6,000 Chartists took possession of the church where the Rev. P. Booth preached a sermon on the words of St. Paul "I have learned in whatever station of life, therewith to be content. A number of the assembly called out "You get £200 a year; come and weave bombazines; put the gas out," etc. etc. (89).

(iii)

Even if we allow that the germ of Barnaby Rudge presented itself to the novelist's imagination as early as 1835 (90) when he visited Newgate, the background of events which, as a very recent political journalist he would have a first hand interest

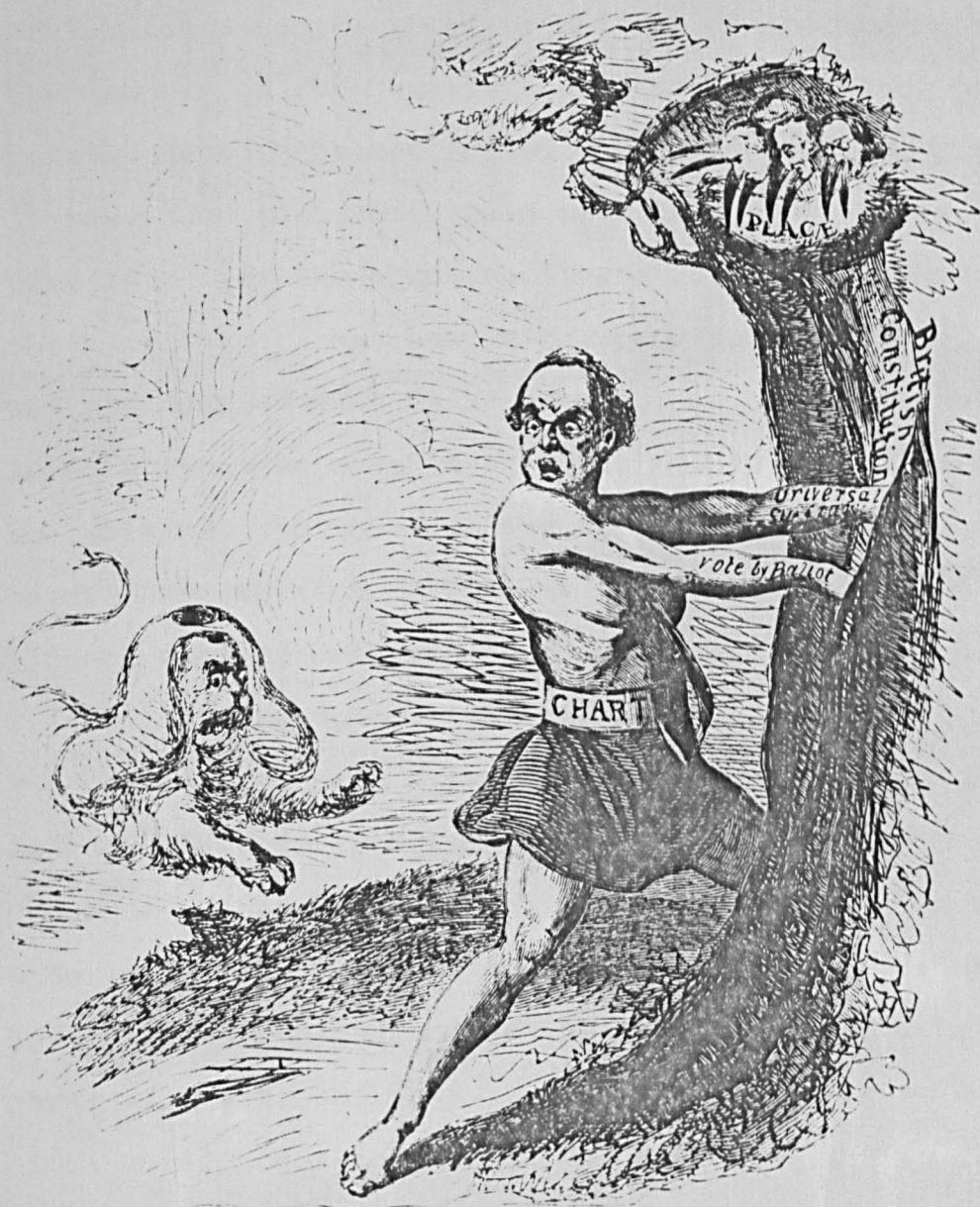
in, was unrest, disorder, riot, political discontent and the threat of revolution. He may have set out to imitate Scott's The Heart of Midlothian - a critical assumption which I think overworked - but the result was to be very different. The continued manifestation of public unrest discussed above had already occurred by the time the novelist planned Barnaby Rudge; during the time of its actual composition even worse was to happen. (91).

The London Working Men's Association was founded on 9th June 1836. It was an attempt to organise workingmen. One of its founders, William Lovett, said that organisations of working men had previously had leaders from the educated middle classes, but he wanted a new kind of movement: "...the working classes had not hitherto evinced that discriminating and independent spirit in the management of their political affairs, which we were desirous to see," he wrote, "they were always looking up to leadership of one description or another...the masses were taught to look up to great men...rather than great principles." (92). Perhaps it was this quality in Chartism which so alarmed the middle and upper classes - it really was a popular movement, a movement of the common people, aimed at achieving popular democracy. Whatever its ends might have been, it was Chartism's means which were first recognised. Bearing, as has been noted by a modern historian, "a deeper sense of wrong" (93), it was more radical in its assumptions and more revolutionary in its public manifestations than any other movement in the public memory.

The Modern Milo.

Shows Feargus O'Connor as Milo, the athlete, who - when old - attempted to tear an oak tree in two but the parts closed upon his hands and while he was held fast he was devoured by wolves: the wolves here are the forces of law and order, the oak is the British Constitution.

Punch Volume III (1842) page 47.



THE MODERN MILO.

From "The Life and Times of Fergus O'Connell."

weavers in the Northern counties). The campaign reached the intensity it did in the years 1838-1840 because at this time it was believed that there was a prospect of a Parliamentary Bill which embodied specific radical demands being taken up. The leaders of the Chartist cause tried to foster national popular support by hotting up their campaign among the people. It was hoped that this would make the Commons more likely to give in. (In the event their contacts in Parliament failed them - O'Connell was busy with trade union problems, Roebuck was preoccupied with Canadian problems, and the rest on whom so much depended were involved in agitation for Free Trade.) The Bill was published on May 8th 1838. In May there was a large demonstration in Glasgow and in August one in Birmingham. Vincent went to Northampton, Manchester, Bristol, Bath, Trowbridge and Birmingham. Hartwell toured the North and Midlands. The demonstration in Glasgow contained some 200,000 who marched in ranks with forty bands playing, 200 flags and banners. The procession took one and a half hours to pass. It was a very orderly affair. It was addressed by Attwood (of the Birmingham Political Union) and Rev. Wade, who said "We have sufficient physical power, but that is not necessary, for we have sufficient moral power to gain all we ask." (97). On the 27th June 1838 some 80,000 marched to the town moor at Newcastle on Tyne and heard speeches by Doubleday, Ayr and O'Connor. Although the military appeared and tried to provoke the crowd the meeting was peaceably concluded (98). Gammage describes the meetings at Northampton and Birmingham as peaceful.

On 17th September there was a meeting at Palace Yard where 30,000 turned up to elect members for the Chartist

Convention, and on the 25th of the same month there was a massive meeting at Kersal Moor, Manchester, where 300,000 persons assembled to hear speeches by O'Connor, Fielden and Stephens. This too was a peaceful meeting. "The meeting was peaceful in the extreme," wrote Robert Gammage, who was there, "and at its conclusion no religious assembly could have dispersed in a more orderly manner." (99). It is surprising how badly those who have taken for granted the Chartist associations of Barnaby Rudge have researched the period. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson refer to "mass meetings at Kersal Moor and Kennington Common...all these...gave special point...to 'a tale of the riots of '80 '..." (100): but Kersal Moor was a peaceful meeting with no aftermath of "trials, convictions, and petitions against punishment of death" (101) and the Kennington Common meeting did not take place until 1848, seven years after Barnaby appeared! It was not until about a year later that the real violence occurred, with the torchlight meetings and threat of incendiarism described by Gammage (102). Stephens was prosecuted for sedition in 1839 and there was a serious riot in Birmingham on July 8th 1839, where force was used against the imported Metropolitan police (103).

The deceptive element in this matter is the use of violent oratory. We shall never know if the Chartists who advocated violence really meant it, or hoped merely to frighten the middle classes into granting their demands. Bronterre O'Brien, for example, claimed in 1837 that he was only disposed to petition "after the fashion of the character in...Gil Blas who presented a petition to his victim with one hand, while pressing

a blunderbuss to his head with the other," (104) and on the other hand we have the Moral Force Chartists so ably represented by William Lovett: "Whatever is gained in England by force, by force must be sustained: but whatever springs from knowledge and justice will sustain itself." (105). The general public would no doubt be alarmed at the speeches of the Physical Force Chartists, the threats seemed real enough. Even Lovett came round to the need to arm once he realised that the government were prepared to put down Chartist meetings (106). But the greatest advocate of violence was Feargus O'Connor, whose references to blood, the sword, arms and so on, have an Old Testament ring about them (107). The point really is, that they talked of violence, and Dickens describes violence in Barnaby Rudge. The Annual Register of 1839 described Chartism as "an insurrection which is expressly directed against the middle classes." (108). After 1842 it should be noted the movement was coming to terms with the idea of allying with any group which would help them gain the Charter. O'Connor himself, for example, found himself on the same platform with such middle class radicals as Sir Joshua Walmsey (109) and Joseph Hume (110).

The real point is that the period when Dickens actually got down to writing Barnaby Rudge was a very brief period of intense Chartist activity, violent in word and in deed. "The Jacobin Club again lives and flourishes and the villainous tyrants shall find to their cost that England too has her Marats, St. Justs and Robespierres," proclaimed The London Democrat in 1839 (111), and the English public believed it.

Bronterre O'Brien had, after all, been the biographer of Robespierre, and Harney called himself "the British Marat". (112). Carlyle's The French Revolution which appeared in 1837 was an awful warning of the effects of the mixing of politics and violence. Its influence on Barnaby Rudge has been noted before (113). Even more interesting in our present context is Carlyle's identification of "revolution" with insanity (114) and flood: "And so it billows free through all Corridors; within and without...nothing but Bedlam, and the great deep broken loose!... And insurrection rages... Covered sits President Boissy, unyielding; like a rock in the beating seas..." (115).

Carlyle does not hesitate to draw the contemporary parallels, such things were, such things are, he says (116): "Wherefore let all know what of depth and of height is still revealed in man; and, with fear and wonder, with just sympathy and just antipathy, with clear eye and open heart, contemplate it...and draw innumerable inferences from it...that there be no second sansculottism in our earth for a thousand years, let us understand well what the first was; and let Rich and Poor of us go and do otherwise..." (117).

We know that Dickens was deeply impressed when he heard Carlyle lecture in 1840, and that he continuously read and re-read The French Revolution. He carried a copy of it in his pocket, and constantly referred to it (118). And this is at the very time when the novelist was composing Barnaby Rudge.

When Parliament met in February 1839 the "people's parliament", the Chartist Convention, met at the same time (119). Quite a number of the delegates were extremists (Physical Force Chartists) and when it was found that the Charter had obtained a mere 600,000 of the anticipated 1,000,000 signatures, missionaries were sent around the country to whip up more enthusiasm. Thus the campaign hotted up (120). The movement had also had a shot in the arm in being joined by the mainstream of the Anti-Poor Law demonstrators, and began to take on a truly revolutionary character. "It was a protest against social oppression, against tyranny which hurt the poor by making them poorer. It was a mass demonstration of misery. It had no programme but the redress of grievances." (121).

The Convention, which met at the British Hotel in Cockspur Street, Charing Cross, in many ways failed. It spent a great deal of time resolving matters of procedure and debating intentions and methods of public action. The extremists in the movement - and this is important - spread the feeling that peaceful means had failed, and the only recourse was to arms. The London Democratic Association met on 2nd March 1839 and was harangued by Harney (122), Ryder and Marsden. The meeting denounced the Convention as delaying and cowardly. Among other condemnatory resolutions they passed was one declaring that the Charter should be presented within a month and that all acts of injustice and oppression should be met by resistance. A public meeting at The Crown and Anchor Tavern, addressed by Harnay and Sankey again stressed the need for forceful action. Signatures alone were no good, Sankey told

the assembly, unless they were the signatures of "millions of fighting men who will not allow any aristocracy, oligarchy, landlords, cotton lords, money lords to tyrannise over them longer." A tobacconist named Rogers spoke darkly of signing the Petition "in red". Feargus O'Connor told them that millions of Petitions would not dislodge troops of Dragoons, and promised that there would be martyrs. Harnay concluded by assuring them that by the end of the year they would have "universal suffrage or death." (123). Many moderates, now alarmed, left the Convention (124).

Fear of Chartism had already brought about extensions to the forces of law and order. The Police reforms instigated by Peel in 1829 were extended by the Rural Police Act of 1839 which provided for the establishment of a professional constabulary in the English counties; and the Metropolitan Police Act of the same year which extended the area covered by the Metropolitan Police Force. These measures, which at a later date included the issue of cutlasses, caused Punch to refer to the Police as "the second government of England." (125).

On the 18th March the Convention debated the Rural Police Act and Dr. Fletcher of Bury told the meeting that "He would not recommend the use of daggers against a Rural Police, but he would recommend every man to have a loaded bludgeon as nearly like that of the policeman's as possible; and if any of these Soldiers of the Government...should strike him, to strike again, and in a manner that a second blow should not be required." (126). While the debates on arming continued in

the Convention, the public campaign in other parts of the country continued: Salt, Vincent, Richards visited Birmingham, Willenhall, Stourbridge, Bilston, Kenilworth, Wolverhampton, Darlaston, West Bromwich, Cornwall, Devon, the South West, the Potteries. On April 9th the Convention resolved that it was lawful to collect arms. On April 22nd O'Connor delivered one of the finest speeches of his career. He told the Convention that missionary work should cease, all delegates should attend until the Charter was presented. He warned that the Government were likely to pounce on the leaders before we could achieve anything. (127). He was aiming to scare away the moderates, whom he describes as "traitors, deserters, lukewarmers." "It is useless to sit philosophising," he said, "delegates should do what their constituents expected them to do - act." (128). He talked of a general strike as an alternative physical or moral force, "meet the cannon with the shuttle." (129).

By May 7th 1839 the Charter had achieved 1,200,000 signatures. The Government had taken measures to prepare for violence. Napier had been appointed to the Command of the Northern districts, to organise police and military resistance in strategic areas - Nottingham, Newcastle on Tyne, Hull, Manchester, Leeds. Lord John Russell, Home Secretary, ordered troops to Newport and Monmouth. (130). The Government obviously expected that there would be trouble when the Petition, "a huge bobbin-like structure" was presented to the Commons by Attwood on 6th May. The Chartists too had armed: pikes were distributed at Norwich, at Middleton in Lancashire

there was gun practice every night, at Rochdale pikes, powder, bullets and guns were handed out. The numerical strength of the would-be rebels was considerable. Rochdale claimed 4,000, Oldham 6,000, Hyde, Ashton, Newton Moor and Stalybridge totalled 30,000 between them (131). On May 3rd there was a Government proclamation against persons who "have of late unlawfully assembled together for the purpose of practising military exercise...many of them armed with bludgeons and other offensive weapons." (132).

Lord Melbourne resigned the premiership on May 7th 1839 (133), an event long waited for by the Chartists. Peel was summoned to form an administration but was unable to do so (134), and Melbourne resumed office. Attwood presented the Chartist Petition in the Commons on July 12th 1839. Under the accepted rules of procedure he was not entitled to make a speech when presenting a petition, and although he spoke well, and sensibly, he was several times interrupted on points of order. He stressed his own belief in peaceful and moderate means, and said he "washed his hands of any idea, of any appeal to physical force," and "deprecatd all such notions...all talk of arms, (and) wished for no arms but the will of the people, legally, fairly, and constitutionally expressed..." (135). The Commons laughed when they saw the awkward size of the Petition (136). But the Commons refused to consider it.

Events now seemed to move along an inevitable course. On July 15th there was a riot in Birmingham, and there was bloodshed; riots followed in Bolton, Manchester, Macclesfield,

Hindley, during August. The Convention dissolved itself on September 6th and many thought that the movement had ended. It had been suppressed by "the good sense of the country...(and) Chartism has vanished into smoke." (137).

But on November 4th there happened one of the most horrid of all Chartist disturbances, the Newport Rising (138). An uprising had been planned to coincide with risings in Yorkshire. O'Connor had cancelled the Yorkshire insurrection but his countermanding orders did not reach the Newport Chartists in time. In a pitched battle about thirty soldiers put several thousand badly armed rioters to flight. There is some doubt about actual numbers involved, Chartist figures being put as high as six thousand (139). For their part in the Newport Rising John Frost, Zephania Williams and William Jones were tried at Monmouth in January 1840 for "levying war against Her Majesty, in Her Realm...compassing to depose the Queen from Her throne...levying war against the Queen, with the intent to compel her to change her measures..." (140). When passing sentences of death, the Chief Justice went to great lengths to stress the anarchic nature of the Chartists' activities: "The man who plunders...property, or lifts his hands against the life of his neighbour, does by his guilty act inflict...a loss or injury on the sufferer... But they who by armed numbers, or violence, or terror, endeavour to put down established institutions, and to introduce in their stead a new order of things, open wide the flood gates of rapine and bloodshed, destroy all security and property, and life; and do their utmost to involve a whole nation in anarchy and ruin." (141). And he

stressed that the Monmouth riot was "a preliminary step to a more general insurrection throughout the kingdom." (142). The Chartists, then, were believed to be pledged to destroying the very structure and fabric of society.

Hatred of the Whigs, associated with the rejection of the Charter and suppression of grievances, was soon - rather oddly - to return a Tory Government. Commentators at the time, the most significant of all being Thomas Carlyle, believed that the Chartist rising had shown that Radicalism was impotent, and placed their faith in a regeneration of an ancient and hallowed social system, headed by the monarch, supported by a paternal aristocracy and government, with a firm foundation in respect for religion. (This became the basis of Disraeli's political ethics.) This is really the main argument of Carlyle's superb essay Chartism, published in 1839. Parliament, which Carlyle with splendid sarcasm calls "the Collected Wisdom of the Nation" has failed. (143). Nor will reports and commissions be of any help. (144). He attacks the neglect of problems by the Church and Aristocracy (145) and stresses that the Condition of England question must be solved by Government, but a Government by a benevolent and, above all, involved Aristocracy (146), while democracy he defines as a "regulated method of rebellion and abrogation...the consummation of No-government and Laissez-faire. It may be natural for our Europe at present, but it cannot be the ultimatum of it." (147). "The New Evangel, a Corporation of the Best, of the Bravest" he finds in a true Aristocracy, who alone could save England (148). But this really serves, I think, to underline the feeling of insecurity

of the time. It only needed true republicans, a French visitor to England at this period remarked, to guide the Chartists in their revolt and they could bring down the "entire social fabric of Great Britain." (149).

To the general public the Chartists' involvement in public disorders could not but seem the dawn of a revolutionary age. "For children and wife we'll war to the knife" proclaimed the banners (150). The newspaper accounts of Chartist meetings of the time would make disturbing reading to the complacent. The Observer of 19th January 1840 carried an account of a meeting of some 500 working men and mechanics in Bethnal Green. Rumours had been rife that a general rising was about to take place, and the Home Office had received communications to the effect that there was to be a series of Chartist insurrections in the metropolis, and a general rising was to be signalled by the setting on fire of different parts of London. The meeting was addressed by Mr. Neesom, who had been one of the delegates at the National Convention: "He stated that the working classes were ground down by unjust and arbitrary laws; that agitation would and must be carried on till the people had a parliament of their own choosing...the spirit of Chartism was alive... He considered the present state of destitution to be owing to the existing Government, who had roused the anger of the people, and caused them to rise, like brave men, in different parts of the country...the people must and would have a democratic Parliament; and there must be nothing but agitation until they are represented... Mr. Spurr, in proposing the first resolution, told the assembled meeting that they alone were the real

gentlemen, and not those who lived upon the produce of the sweat of the brow of their fellow creatures...and was proceeding to tell them that a celebrated man had once said 'Put your trust in God and keep your powder dry' when a tremendous noise was heard, and the door...burst open; Superintendent Pearce, of the H division, making his appearance, with a naked cutlass in his hand, followed by some inspectors and a large body of constables. At first the Chartists...seemed inclined to resistance, but the appearance of the policemen, armed with cutlasses and staves, intimidated them, and a general rush was made to the door... On searching the room several weapons were found, and...between 20 and 30 knives, daggers etc., and a quantity of balls and powder, and another loaded pistol." (151).

We need only read the words uttered by a rabble-rouser like Stephens to understand the middle class horror at "the Chimera of Chartism": "If the musket and the pistol, the sword and the pike were of no avail, let the women take the scissors, the child the pin or the needle. If all failed, then the fire-brand - aye - the fire-brand... The Palace shall be in flames..." (152).

I doubt if Dickens "welcomed the People's Charter, (and) took it to be a sign that the nation was developing a political consciousness...(and) rejoiced to see these grievances formulated..." (153). He may have sympathised with the sufferings of the poor, the unemployed, the politically exploited, but he reacted as a member of the genteel class, with all the fervour of a new member. Professor Edgar Johnson thinks quite

otherwise. "Dickens had been sympathetic to the Chartist Programme..." he says (154) and goes on to demonstrate his own confused assumptions by adding that "(Dickens) agreed with Carlyle's declaration in a thick pamphlet entitled Chartism that the movement voiced a just protest against social organisation dominated by privilege and wealth..." (155).

But as we have seen, Carlyle wanted the aristocratic classes to re-awaken themselves to the responsibilities of their privilege, and rule the land firmly and well. Parliament had failed, Carlyle believed, not because it was insufficiently reformed, but because it was not in the nature of things for elected parliaments to work properly: there were those who had been born to rule, and Carlyle found them everywhere neglecting their responsibility.

Does Dickens want to change society, or not? We can never really be sure, for frequently he contradicts himself within the pages of the same book. David Copperfield in conversation with Mr. Spenlow (a very sympathetic portrait of an old gentleman) hears him say that it was the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them (156) and after some mild debate David "found he was right." (157). Hardly "radical"! And yet in the same book, we find that delicious conversation about "Blood" - concluded by the simpering fellow with weak legs "we can't forego Blood, fellows... Myself, I'd rather at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I'd be picked up by a man who hadn't!" (158). At one moment he accepts the establishment, at another he mocks it.

We really have no overt clue as to Dickens' intentions in Barnaby Rudge except what he says in the Preface. His object in writing the book was to demonstrate the social dangers sometimes attendant on a false religious cry, and to write an historical novel on a subject not treated previously by any other novelist. Therefore we enter on shifty ground in trying to locate in Barnaby Rudge specific social or political comment. We have no evidence, directly from Dickens himself, that "he makes his historical romance a tract for the times, relating it to some of the social and political preoccupations of the years of writing." (159). Such legislative criticism has its own special danger: in the true spirit of Isaiah LIII.5, numbers of critics follow the leader blindly into error: Jack Lindsay echoes Holy Writ: "The topicality of Barnaby needs no stressing," he says, "the previous five years had seen a sharp rise in the movements of popular protest," and goes on to refer to "mass gatherings on Kersal Moor and Kennington Common..." (160), and he continues to enumerate - without acknowledgment - all the other suggestions in Dickens at Work, including the insanity issue, Oxford's assassination attempt, the Protestant Association, public executions etc. etc. "The theme of Barnaby," he claims, "was thus excellently calculated to encourage him... to tackle a theme that brought him squarely up against contemporary reality." (161).

It is of course in the nature of things that an imaginative literary artist such as Dickens would present comment in terms of fable, symbol, allegory, but in order logically to demonstrate the validity of this hypothesis we need to establish

C H A P T E R E I G H T
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BARNABY RUDGE - A CASE HISTORY

"A tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and instruction,
Signifying something."

Dickens' emendation of the lines in Macbeth Act V Sc.v with
which he concludes his article, Idiots in Household Words
4th June 1853.

(i)

The character of Barnaby himself has caused some bother, some authorities cannot see the significance of his place in the novel at all. Edgar Johnson, for example, claims that the novel's central character "has no organic connection (with the plot)" (1). Kathleen Tillotson has an extremely poor view of the function of Barnaby in the structure of the novel, she finds him to be merely an expression of "the Dickensian compassion for the helpless and exploited..." (2). Sylvere Monod is equally dismissive: "He has not single heroic quality, being no more than an unfortunate idiot and playing no essential part." (3). The clue to Barnaby's place in the novel lies in a consideration of his mental state, and the reason behind Dickens' choosing such a figure to hold a leading place.

I believe he chose a character such as Barnaby because he wanted to show someone utterly simple, child-like, someone in whom purity attains its apogee, in order to body forth in almost archetypal form the effects and consequences of contamination with civilization. Barnaby is tempted to join the mob because he seeks gold, and believes that gold is to be found only in crowds and bustle. He has been so guarded and secluded by his mother, and is so simple (much of his behaviour, it should be pointed out, is not so much deranged as utterly child-like) that his reason will not save him from temptation. He is happy at home, in the country, with his mother. He is lured to the city, where he almost comes to a tragic end. Also, by using this figure, and developing the possibilities of hallucinatory

derangement, Dickens is able considerably to extend the range of his imagism. Lilian M. Hatfield Brush, the Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Maine, in 1935 attempted to analyse Barnaby's ailment. The diagnosis was "regression psychosis of the paraphrenetic type." (4). Clinical terms have changed much since the 1930's. (5). Professor Brush claims that Dickens is describing a case of what is called nowadays Paraphrenia fantastica. In this condition the subject seems cut off from the world of reality for much of the time, and although coherent, either imagines himself to be someone else of considerable importance (Napoleon, the King, God, etc.) or - and this is the condition Barnaby has - to have the most intense auditory and visual delusions. Patients see tigers on the mantelpiece, or snakes coming out of the taps. Modern clinical psychiatrists do not now tend to separate off "paraphrenia" as a classifiable mental illness; the symptoms are usually grouped with Hebephrenia or Paranoid Schizophrenia. The dividing lines, are, in any case, fairly arbitrary. (6). Barnaby sees figures in the smoke in the fire of the bedroom at the Maypole (and Dickens uses this as a symbolic portrait of the human competitive society, all hanging on to one another's heels and dancing round in a wild ballet). Changes in clinical theory and development of drugs have completely altered the treatment in modern times. Patients are not so institutionalised today, and may be either sent home (under supervision) or socialised and given occupational and group therapy. In many cases they can be "brought back" into real contact with others, and the condition, it is believed, may become rarer. This is interesting in the light of Barnaby's case, as the boy really seems to come to

Barnaby in Newgate.

"Who cares for Grip... He never speaks in this place; he never says a word in jail; he sits and mopes all day in his dark corner, dozing sometimes, and sometimes looking at the light that creeps through the bars..."

Barnaby Rudge Chapter 73.



his senses when he returns to the country: "...the patient is living with his mother again in one of the neighbouring villages, and friends report that his whole experience in London seems like a terrible dream to him and that he cannot be urged to return to that city, but that he has in everything else become more rational..." (7).

According to modern clinical definition the appearance of Barnaby's condition seems to be well portrayed, and well maintained by the novelist: it was "precipitated" by shock, and it is now well established that such traumatic experiences can cause the mental state described by Dickens. (8). Also his eventual rehabilitation, once the crisis is over, the riots have passed and he lives with his mother in the peace of the country in an almost idyllic primitivism, is in accord with modern theory. Some authorities on the schizophrénias doubt its existence among primitives untouched by civilization, and seek to show that its incidence is invariably greatest in the densely populated centres. (9). Serious pathology of the family environment, particularly over-anxious and obsessive mothers, are very frequently in the background history of those afflicted with this kind of mental disturbance. (10). Dickens stresses Barnaby's Mother's almost stifling care for her son, her smothering protective policy. (11).

Although not a profound or searching critic of Dickens, I think Forster very sensibly pointed out the real function of Barnaby when he described him as a "light-hearted idiot, as unconscious of guilt as of suffering:" and "happy with no sense but of the influences of nature..." (12). Dickens' delineation

of Barnaby and his condition is vivid and moving. His use of such a figure is subtle and rich. We must also acknowledge that for its date, the description of mental ill-health is very compassionate and interestingly accurate.

Very little was known about mental derangement and even less about its treatment: (13) Philippe Pinel (1745-1826) was the first physician to treat mental patients humanely, that is to say, as if they were ill and not as if they were offenders. His work was not widely known in this country by the time Dickens was writing Barnaby Rudge. Pinel attempted to classify mental diseases, but the first widely accepted system of classification was that of Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926) whose Compendium der Psychiatrie was not published until 1883. The intriguing question is, where did Dickens learn so much about the disturbed mental state he described? The point is, that this is quite a good, and certainly a consistent portrait of a recognisable mental condition. We have no evidence that the novelist visited mental institutes before the period of Barnaby Rudge, the earliest mention of asylums in Johnson's biography of Dickens dates from his first visit to the U.S. (14).

An obvious personal source of direct information would be Dickens' association with Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) (Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury). He had been a Lunacy Commissioner for most of his career, and had urged reform of the Lunacy Laws since 1829. Dickens certainly heard him speak in the Commons during his time as a reporter (15) and Lord Ashley had offered, through Fitzgerald, to have Dickens shown what mill

and factory conditions were really like (16). Dickens replied that he was well acquainted "With that Nobleman's excellent exertions, and with the evidence which he was the means of bringing forward..." (17). We know that at the time of composing Barnaby Dickens actively supported Lord Ashley's movement for factory reform, especially as it affected the employment of girls and young boys (18) and that he came to be disillusioned in the efficacy of Parliament after witnessing the defeat in the Commons of reforming measures by philanthropists like Grote, Lord Ashley and Lord John Russell - defeated mostly by callous political obstruction - in the early 1840's (19). For the rest of his career Dickens continued his energetic support of Shaftesbury's practical reforms (20). We also know that Dickens and Lord Ashley were personally known to each other (21) but tantalisingly enough we have no record of any conversation or correspondence about Ashley's interest in the insane.

Lord Ashley and the novelist seldom met (22) but frequently paid public tribute to one another's work (23). Dickens' aid had been requested in the question of The Sanatorium, or "Home in Sickness" founded in 1840 by Dr. Southwood-Smith (1788-1861) which was finally opened at Devonshire House, York Gate, which was very close to Dickens' home at 1 Devonshire Terrace. The Committee decided to increase subscriptions and further its publicity by a dinner. Dickens exerted himself in this project. Maclise, Macready, Robert Browning, Forster, were among the notables who attended and Lord Ashley was in the chair. In his speech Dickens said that "To Lord Ashley the most oppressed and neglected classes would have to return thanks for ages to

come..." (24). Lord Ashley replied that "it was most gratifying to him to aid in the advance of any effort to ameliorate the condition of society; and it was particularly gratifying to have it thus acknowledged by one who had done so much...to arouse the sympathies of all..." (25). The dinner was held 29th June 1843. Shaftesbury wrote to Forster after Dickens' death that "God had given him, as it were a 'general retainer' for all suffering and repression..." (26). We have no direct evidence that Dickens and Lord Ashley talked about the care and state of the insane (27), we have two valid pieces of evidence - Dickens' vivid portrait of a young man with apparent paraphrenia fantastica, and Lord Ashley's lifelong interest and direct involvement, personal and official, in the care of the insane - it would seem a reasonable inference that the two talked about these matters, probably before and during the earlier part of 1841 while Dickens was working on Barnaby Rudge.

Another, more likely, source of Dickens' obvious knowledge of mental illnesses would be Dr. John Conolly (1794-1866). Conolly worked in Warwickshire asylums and became Medical Professor at University College, London in 1828. He was resident physician at Warwick 1830-1838 and at Hanwell Asylum, Middlesex 1839-1844. Conolly is given a worthy place in medical history for his advocacy of the humane treatment of the insane, and his work on The Indications of Insanity (1830) and Croonian Lectures (1849) are rightly considered landmarks in clinical psychiatry. Conolly was maliciously satirized by Charles Reade in his novel Very Hard Cash serialised in All the Year Round during 1863. Dickens publicly disowned any association with this story in

the issue of December 26th 1863. (28). Letters which passed between Dickens and Conolly at this time demonstrate the close friendship which existed (29). Conolly's major contribution to medicine was probably The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraint published in 1856 (30). Dickens was clearly aware of Conolly's work, in American Notes (1842) he refers to the mental institution at South Boston as being "admirably conducted on those enlightened principles of conciliation and kindness, which twenty years ago would have been worse than heretical and which have been acted upon with so much success in our own Asylum at Hanwell" (31). In an article on The Treatment of the Insane in Household Words he quotes "the opinion of the highest living authority upon these matters, when we say 'that all persons of unsound mind should become the care of the state....' We quote these suggestions from Dr. Conolly's work on The Indications of Insanity published in 1830." (32). In 1857 Dickens spoke at the second anniversary dinner of The Royal Hospital for Incurables. Dr. Conolly was present, and was toasted by the novelist who referred to him as "a distinguished gentleman who was not more remarkable for his talent than he was for possessing the kindest and tenderest heart..." (33). In Dickens' library at his death were copies of Conolly's Croonian Lectures and A Study of Hamlet of 1863. (34).

We also know that Dickens had read works by Dr. John Abercrombie (1780-1844) including Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers of 1830 and Philosophy of the Moral Feeling published in 1833. The two works had considerable vogue. Abercrombie attempted to rehabilitate the discovered facts of

natural science with the revelations of religion. Dickens also read works on the insane by Dr. William Wood, whose works were often praised in Household Words (35). It seems that Dickens had certainly done his homework. (36). Another possible source of Dickens' knowledge of mental illness is the work of John Haslam (1764-1844) who was physician at Bethlehem Hospital until dismissed for abuses and cruelties after the investigation by the Committee of the House of Commons in 1815. It is suggested that Dickens was familiar with Haslam's Observations on Madness and Melancholia: Including Practical Remarks on those Diseases published in 1809. (37). It has been claimed that the novelist was introduced to Haslam's work by either Alexander John Sutherland (1810-1867) who was physician at St. Luke's Hospital, or Dr. John Conolly. (38).

Barnaby is an extremely useful figure for Dickens' purpose and consequently he is a key figure in the imaginative structure of the novel. His condition - however "accurately" described by Dickens (- here I am trying to heed H.J. Eysenck's warning about basing an elaborate psychoanalytic study on a "non-existent person" (39) -) is one which offered the novelist opportunities he exploited brilliantly to add a new dimension to fiction. Shakespeare used the unrestrained flights of fancy released in the conversation of a mad king, a professional fool and a young man feigning insanity to present a poetic world of dialogue unequalled in pathos, universality or wit. Dickens uses a young man suffering from a tragic hallucinatory psychosis to make us see and feel the real world keener than the sane.

The schizophrenic group of illnesses are mainly marked by "a disintegration or by a totally unrealistic and entirely subjective relationship with the outside world, based on fantasy..." (40), but in the case of Barnaby's vision we see the world heightened by fantasy. The images and symbols Barnaby produces in his ramblings do not hide reality, which is the usual Freudian interpretation of the symbolism of the unconscious imagination, but reveal it. The American psychologist C.S. Hall has attempted to dispose of the weight of Freudian interpretation of symbolism by suggesting that the symbols the mind produces are not an attempt to disguise thoughts, emotions (41), responses, but attempts further to define, to evaluate and interpret responses; it is an expressive device, not a means of disguise (42). What Barnaby sees and hears has the immediacy of dreams, the dreams of somebody wide awake.

The various kinds of schizophrenia are difficult to define, in some cases they seem to shade into one another, but what gives the schizophrenic disorders their essential sameness are the disturbances of thought, emotions and contacts with reality (43). For Barnaby's condition we may choose one of the four possible "labels" as Andrew Crowcroft calls them (44). The four main types are: Simple: which is characterised by lack of emotional depth, other-worldliness, isolation and a lack of activity, a gradual diminution of the use of inner resources and a retreat to increasingly stereotyped patterns of behaviour: Hebephrenia: which produces shallow and incongruous emotional responses which seem foolish, bizarre behaviour and illusions and hallucinations, voices, strange visual experiences, sometimes

hallucinations of the sense of smell and feeling: Catatonic: this produces striking motor behaviour, trances, rigidity of posture, mutism and totally unpredictable motor behaviour: and finally Paranoid: which shows itself in feelings of persecution, being watched, plotted against. What unites these terrible mental illnesses is the common presence of hallucinations, "mental impressions of sensory vividness, occurring without external stimulus." (45). It was first categorised by Kraepelin, who originally called the schizophrenic condition "dementia praecox". The name schizophrenic was given to this group by Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) who stressed the significance of the lack of co-ordination between the various psychological functions. (46). The Swiss-American psychiatrist Adolf Meyer (1866-1950) indicated that the mental and physical aspects of these illnesses were related.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) directed his enquiries into the schizophrenias with the symbolic manifestations of the hallucinatory visions: these, he claimed, were the dreams of the normal mind, experienced while awake - a retreat to a less mature level of the ego, a replacing of reality with fantasy, "a totally unrealistic and entirely subjective relationship with the outside world, based on fantasy." (47). Carl Gustav Jung's interest in the schizophrenias was directed to examining the unusual strength of the unconscious, which he claimed was not only the pressure of the individual's past life but also the collective unconscious of the race.

Of especial interest in Barnaby's case is the work of Harry Stack Sullivan (1892-1949) who believed it was the result of faulty inter-personal relationships, especially between parent and child. (48). Here we have some interesting evidence in the peculiarly guarded and motherly attitude of Mrs. Rudge to her son. (49). Dickens' emphasis on the social isolation Barnaby is subjected to by his well-meaning mother fits into the general context of modern understanding of schizophrenic disorders. (50).

It is, I believe, impossible to diagnose Barnaby's condition from the evidence Dickens gives us; I would further say that it is also utterly pointless, one kind of schizophrenic disorder shades into another and the application of the correct "labels" is difficult enough for the practitioners of psychiatric medicine, and the symptoms themselves can often be amorphous. (51). What is important in considering Barnaby, and the place he has in the novel which bears his name, is the strong feature Dickens makes of his visionary hallucinations. All the experts on schizophrenia, from Kraepelin to Sullivan, stress the importance of the hallucinatory experiences of the schizophrenic sufferer, characterised by what Bleuler called "autism". By this term he means the kind of thinking which is dominated by self-generated fantasy, "uncorrected by reference to external reality". (52). Autism has the directness of the dream, the sudden illuminating flash of insight - even though that insight may be conveyed in terms of an image or a symbol not immediately comprehensible - the sudden appearance of uncalled images, emblems, imaginings which poets talk of. (53).

It is my belief that Barnaby has a central and basic function in the structure of Barnaby Rudge. Through him Dickens once again demonstrates one of his permanent themes - the corruption of innocence by a cynical world. He is, in effect, a child, though when we first see him we are told he is twenty three years old: "Now Heaven help this silly fellow" murmurs Gabriel Varden when he meets Barnaby on the road at night when young Chester has been robbed and wounded. (54). Barnaby is "silly" in the archaic sense of that word, an utterly innocent, completely simple unspoiled young man, not in any way touched or tarnished by the world - saelig. (55).

Barnaby also offers several important parallels with the Perceval legend. Perceval's father, in several versions of this magnificent story (56) dies a violent death at the hands of a murderous knight. The boy's mother, like Mrs. Rudge, does all in her power to keep him from being tainted by the ways of chivalry, sophistication and civilization. Emphasis is placed, by Chaucer and other poets, on the plainness of young Perceval's diet - we are told he drank water of the well (57) but like Barnaby, he is tempted away to the town, a victim of his own innocence. I am not suggesting that Dickens consciously imitated the Perceval story, but that as a poet of the imagination, a man in tune with the archetypal, fundamental stories of myth and folk tradition, his choice of the figure of the guileless innocent was a natural one.

Dickens gives us a wonderful portrait of Barnaby before he is tempted by the lure of gold, and shows us how happy he is in

his innocence: the widow reflects with gratitude that it is as a result of his mental deprivation that her boy is so cheerful and affectionate - not because he is mad but because he is simple, young in heart and spirit and unsoiled by society. "How often did she call to mind that but for that, he might have been sullen, morose, unkind, far removed from her... How often had she cause for comfort, in his strength, and hope, and in his simple nature! Those feeble powers of mind...even they were a comfort now. The world to him was full of happiness; in every tree, and plant, and flower, in every bird, and beast, and tiny insect whom a breath of summer wind laid low upon the ground, he had delight. His delight was hers; and where many a wise son would have made her sorrowful, this poor light-hearted idiot filled her breast with thankfulness and love..." (58). The novelist is here showing Barnaby not so much as a lunatic, as a "fool of the field".

Dickens instinctively selected to create a character in an archetypal mould, one whose significance would strike home directly, with all the strength of traditional symbol. Barnaby is a fool, he has been deliberately secluded by his mother, and he is tempted to join the rioters and go to the town to find gold. But the very simplicity the mother fosters betrays the boy, as in the case of Perceval. (59). We can sense Barnaby's utter unworldliness when Sir John Chester gives him a tip for running a message. "This for your pains" says Chester, "For Grip, and me, and Hugh, to share among us" answers Barnaby, "Grip one, me two, Hugh three; the dog, the goat, the cats - well, we shall spend it pretty soon, I warn you..." (60).

In the smoke going up the chimney Barnaby sees figures dancing, following and pursuing one another as in some social rat-race: "Now, where do they go to, when they spring so fast up there... eh? Why do they tread so closely on each other's heels, and why are they always in a hurry - which is what you blame me for, when I only take pattern by these busy folk about me. More of 'em! catching to each other's skirts; and as fast as they go, others come! What a merry dance it is!..." (61). Here Barnaby is placed as an outsider, a mere observer of the busy world of men, seen - significantly - in the smoke.

The London to which Barnaby is tempted is usually shown in this novel with accompaniments of darkness and gloom (62) where Chester's view of life as jostling for money is paralleled by the criminality of London. We are frequently shown that Barnaby's natural environment is the country. He is really at one with the landscape here: "We have been afield, mother-leaping ditches, scrambling through hedges, running down steep banks, up and away, and hurrying on. The wind has been blowing, and the rushes and young plants bowing and bending to it..." (63). It is during this scene that Barnaby's mother prays that his father - who murdered for money - will never see her son, for fear that Rudge will taint him: "Evil will fall upon him if you stand eye to eye. My blighted boy! Oh! all good angels who know the truth - hear a poor mother's prayer, and spare my boy from knowledge of this man." (64). We have been prepared to accept Rudge as a visitor from an evil world; his dress is dank and drenched with wet, he is besmeared with mire; his beard unshaven, his face unwashed, his cheeks hollowed: and Mrs. Rudge

asks him in the name of Heaven why he comes to "darken" their home? (65). Soon after this we are shown Rudge in the gloom of London, at night, desolate and alone. He asks lodging of the blind Stagg, telling him that he had been "traversing this iron-hearted town all night." (66).

In contrast to this we have the sun-lit good cheer of the natural Barnaby. The description of the journey of Barnaby and his mother to Chigwell is used by Dickens fully to present Barnaby's happiness and naturalness. (67). Like a happy child he "fluttered here and there, now leaving her far behind, now lingering far behind himself, now darting into some by-lane or path and leaving her to pursue her way alone, until he stealthily emerged again and came upon her with a wild shout of merriment... Now he would call to her from the topmost branch of some high tree by the roadside; now using his tall staff as a leaping pole, come flying over ditch or hedge or five-barred gate... These were his delights; and when his patient mother heard his merry voice, or looked into his flush and healthy face, she would not have abated them by one sad word or murmur... It is something to look upon enjoyment, so that it be free and wild and in the face of nature, though it is but the enjoyment of an idiot. It is something to know that Heaven has felt the capacity of gladness in such a creature's breast; it is something to be assured that, however lightly men may crush that faculty in their fellows, the Great Creator of mankind imparts it even to his despised and slighted work... Listen to the million voices in the summer air, and find one dismal as your own. Remember...the sense of hope and pleasure which every glad

return of day awakens in the breast of all your kind who have not changed their nature..." (68).

This delightful picture of man-in-nature is strongly contrasted to the "civilised", almost debased, world of Chester, with which this chapter opens: "Leaving the favoured, and well-received, and flattered of the world; him of the most worldly, who never compromised himself by an ungentlemanly action and was never guilty of a manly one; to lie smilingly asleep - for even sleep...became with him a piece of cold, conventional hypocrisy..." (69) and further evidence of Chester's unnatural, supercilious view of life is presented by his comments on class and ailments: "The door will be opened immediately," he tells Mr. Haredale, "there is nobody but a very delapidated female to perform such offices. You will excuse her infirmities? If she were in a more elevated station of society, she would be gouty. Being but a hewer of wood and drawer of water, she is rheumatic. My dear Haredale, these are natural class distinctions, depend upon it..." (70) and his profound faith in the efficacy of money: "...I have found it necessary to take some active steps towards setting this boy and girl attachment quite at rest, and have begun by removing these two agents. You are surprised? Who can withstand the influence of a little money?..." (71). To this world of money, civilization and cultured deportment we contrast the simple, organic and happy life led by Barnaby and his mother while "the worst passions of the worst men were thus working in the dark..." (72) and threaten to "become the shroud of all that was good and peaceful in society." (73).

They live "In a small English country town, the inhabitants of which supported themselves by the labour of their hands in plaiting and preparing straw for those who made bonnets and other articles of dress and ornament..." (74). The basis of the peace and happiness of this small town, resting as it does on the fact that it is not only in the country but supports itself by the labour of its hands, is important. One is reminded of Carlyle's lament at the encroaching mechanization of life, written some ten years before this novel: "Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it...above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word... Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster... We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come all always victorious, and loaded with spoils..." (75).

One is further reminded of the way in which both Carlyle and Dickens foreshadowed Marx. The amazing similarity between some of their basic assumptions about the state of "modern" society, and the social theory of Karl Marx has led, of course, to some rather wild pseudo-economic-political criticism (Jackson, Wilson) but the similarity of their portrait of the mechanization of human beings should be acknowledged. "Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and...

all charm for the work. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him..." (76). Lewis Mumford in the late 1920's described the effects of machines on men in Technics and Civilization. He divides history into three distinct phases, the Eotechnic Age - the age of high handicraft and sophisticated design, which ends with Adam Smith and the beginnings of the Factory System: the Paleotechnic Age, the age of iron and steam, which opens with Watt's steam engine, and has its bases in coal and iron, creates noisy cities, pollutes nature, creates slums, maniacally exploits natural resources (e.g. devastates forests) and produces a brutalised proletariat on the one hand, the modern age of capitalism, and on the other, a new age of barbarism and savagery: and lastly, the Neotechnic Age, the dawn of which Age we live in, the new age of plenty, decentralization, smaller factories, rural units, cleanliness, beauty, plenty--provided we create a satisfactory world financial system. This is interesting comment in this context, as Dickens is describing the Paleotechnic Age. Mumford claims that the Victorian period was so frightful that literature looked elsewhere. (77). "Thackeray deliberately cast his works in a pre-industrial environment," he claims, "Carlyle...denounced the actualities of Victorian work. Dickens satirized the stock promoter... Balzac and Zola...left no question as to its degradation and nastiness. Other artists turned with Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites back to the Middle Ages, where Overbeck and Hoffman in Germany, and Chateaubriand and Hugo in France had preceded them: still others turned with Browning to Renaissance Italy, with Doughty to Primitive Arabia, with Melville and

Gauguin to the South Seas, with Thoreau to the primitive woods, with Tolstoy to the peasants. What did they seek? A few simple things not to be found between the railroad terminal and the factory..." (78).

Dickens of course is not a sociologist, he does not analyse causes or prescribe remedies: but with the keen eye and ready pen of the professional writer, he describes the effects of applied Adam Smithism. What Dickens described in the 1840's has now become one of the modern industrial sociologist's major concerns. (79). It has also become the subject of the contemporary novelist: "The minute you stepped through the factory gates you thought no more about your work. But the funniest thing was that neither did you think about your work when you were standing at your machine. You began the day by cutting and drilling...with care, but gradually your actions became automatic... The noise of motor trolleys...and the excruciating din of flying and flapping belts slipped out of your consciousness..." Thus Alan Sillitoe describes the life of Arthur Seaton in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. (80). This is the Eden theme, the longing for a world unspoiled by Progress, which is a constant and continuous theme in Dickens, and one of those which link the early novels with the later so-called "darker" Dickens. It is a theme running right through Dickens. Johnson describes how he was early interested in the effects of the factory system but "although horror and indignation sank deep in his heart, (he) could not deal with things still so strange to his imagination as those dust-laden mills and their thunderous machines. He could take lethal notes on a brutal police-court magistrate or a tyrannical schoolmaster...the

sodden misery of nineteenth century industrialism spreading like a slow sore through the factory towns and the potteries and the iron foundries was to elude his pen for years to come. Not until a decade and a half later, in Hard Times...would he strike that 'heaviest blow' against those dark satanic mills and the greed that imprisoned helpless human beings in their dismal shades." (81). But I believe he expressed his protest at the way life was degenerating, and the ethos of England's becoming coarse, materialistic, mechanical and impersonal in the form most appropriate to a poet and mythologist - a symbolic tale.

We know Dickens was aware of the horrors of modern industry, we know he was disgusted with what people were prepared to do to one another to make money, and what little thought they gave to spoiling the environment; it is true that he does not overtly attack the "system" until Hard Times, but it is no less true that a lament for a kind of life before it was spoiled by industry and commerce, a kind of pre-"industrial" fall-way-of-life, is nevertheless a criticism, an attack, on modern industrialism. (82). That Dickens' pleading for the purity and simple fraternities of pre-industrial life was not just a literary pose we may see from his correspondence. He writes to his wife to describe his visit to Stratford, Kenilworth, Warwick, Wolverhampton and Birmingham, in 1838: "We found a roaring fire, an elegant dinner, a snug room...all ready for us at Leamington... We started in a postchaise next morning for Kenilworth which we...were enraptured with and where I really think we must have lodgings next summer... You cannot conceive how delightful it is... From here we went on to Warwick Castle

...and thence to Stratford upon Avon where we sat down in the room where Shakespeare was born... We remained at Stratford all night, and found to our unspeakable dismay that father's plan of proceeding by Bridgenorth was impracticable... So we were compelled to come here by way of Birmingham and Wolverhampton...such a mass of dirt and gloom and misery as I never before witnessed..." (83).

In the summer of 1841 he wrote to tell Forster about a book which described the toils of factory workers. This book was possibly A Narrative of the Experience and Suffering of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple written by himself (84). The summary on the title-page of Dodd's book describes it as: "...an account of the hardships and sufferings (Dodd) endured in early life, under what difficulties he acquired his education, the effects of factory labour on his mind and person, the unsuccessful efforts made by him to obtain a livelihood in some other line of life, the comparison he draws between agricultural and manufacturing labourers, and other matters relating to the working classes." It was dedicated to Lord Ashley (85). It seems a fair assumption that this is the book Dickens refers to when he writes "I subscribed for a couple of copies of this little book. I knew nothing of the man, but he wrote me a very modest letter...some weeks ago. I have been much affected by the little biography at the beginning... I wish we were all in Eden again - for the sake of these toiling creatures..." (86).

For Barnaby himself, it seems that the quest for gold constitutes the most important lodestar of his life: "A brave

evening, Mother! If we had, chinking in our pockets, but a few specks of that gold which is piled up yonder in the sky, we should be rich for life" he tells his mother, (87) only to be cautioned in reply: "we are better as we are... Let us be contented, and we do not want and need not care to have it, though it lay shining at our feet..." (88). "Ay" said Barnaby, resting with crossed arms on his spade, and looking wistfully at the sunset, "that's well enough, mother; but gold's a good thing to have. I wish I knew where to find it..." (89). It is important to take note of the way in which Barnaby confuses gold with the stars, as the stars for him constitute an important set of symbols.

The symbolism of Barnaby Rudge is a neglected study, and yet it is truly significant in the work, and a discussion of its symbols helps us to get to grips with the essence of the novel. Some have doubted that there is much symbolism in this novel. One of the most sensible commentators on Dickens' symbolism, C.A. Bodelsen, wrote that "In all the novels after Pickwick (with the partial exception of Nicholas Nickleby and Barnaby Rudge) the symbolic pattern is interwoven with that of the action. It is the former that is the most important. It expresses the real meaning of the book much more adequately than the latter, and it constitutes a separate structure with a unity of its own, which keeps the book together." (90). To get at the symbolic structure of the novel is really to reach its innermost meaning. The symbolism of Barnaby does not have the coherence of Dombey and Son and Bleak House, but it does help us understand better Dickens' intentions. One great

quality that Dickens' symbolism has is that it is seldom morbid, it is invariably "real" - that is to say, the logic of the events which are described symbolically is not that of a dream, but of ordinary narrative: "The essence of the technique is that one set of events which might have actually taken place, and for which the writer at any rate invites a suspension of disbelief, is used to symbolise an underlying meaning..." (91). It is this quality in Dickens I think, which in so many respects justified Chesterton's dictum that he "was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the great mythologists, and perhaps the greatest..."

(ii)

The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge represent a new departure in Dickens' art. We are conscious, in reading them, that something has happened to Dickens' imagination since Pickwick, Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby. We feel that his mind now operates in a different atmosphere. The quality of the imagination is different, the atmosphere richer, more intense. I suggest that there are two main areas where this difference may particularly be sensed: he has moved from the original assumptions behind the early novels that human affairs, however misguided and unfair they may appear, have yet the almost certain hope of being optimistically resolved; (Oliver is rescued by Mr. Brownlow and given the respectable place in society his suffering and modesty deserved, the evil machinations of Squeers, Gride and Ralph are foiled, Nicholas and Kate achieve happy and prosperous marriages) and with this growing recognition of the indifference of providence comes the

development in Dickens' imagism to symbolise these realisations in the novel. It is quite true, powerful symbolism is present in Oliver and Nickleby, but it is almost invariably there to colour and heighten some aspect of the fable, to underline the filth of Fagin, the evil of Ralph and the world he moves in, the purity of the countryside where Oliver finds himself and so on. It is not there as a permanent and cohesive element within the very structure of the novel.

There are two important groups of images which hold together the structure of Barnaby Rudge, and which bring together the two major themes of the public vortex and the family tensions. These are the images associated with stars, and those which are symbols of the devilry which Dickens sees in society. The stars are used frequently by Dickens to suggest indifference in human beings, or the inability of the heavens directly to intervene in human affairs. There is evidence in The Old Curiosity Shop, Martin Chuzzlewit and Great Expectations of Dickens' continued use of the image of the stars as emblems of indifference. The sections in The Old Curiosity Shop have already been touched upon, but before considering the use of stellar imagery in Barnaby Rudge, the use of the stars in Chuzzlewit and Great Expectations should be briefly discussed.

Writing of the destruction of human values and the greater respect paid to machinery in the United States Dickens wrote: "It shall cost a man more dollars in the way of penalty and fine, and satisfaction of the outraged law, to deface in wantonness that senseless mass of metal, than to take the lives of

twenty human creatures! Thus the stars wink upon the bloody stripes; and Liberty pulls down her cap upon her eyes, and owns Oppression in its vilest aspect, for her sister." (92).

In Great Expectations stellar imagery is a leading feature of the symbolic structure of the novel. Pip looks at the stars and "considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude". (93). As he leaves Joe's to go to Miss Havisham's for the first time the stars "twinkled out one by one, without throwing any light on the question why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's and what on earth I was expected to play at." (94). We should also note that when Pip gives the admiring Joe and Mrs. Joe his mendacious account of his visit to Miss Havisham's he tells them: "We played with flags...Estella waved a blue flag...and Miss Havisham waved one sprinkled all over with little gold stars..." (95), thus linking together this vital configuration of heartlessness and indifference. Estelle's name means a star, and she is the personification of coldness and indifference. She is sighted carrying a candle down the dark passages of Satis House "like a star" and Pip senses that she "looks down on" him (96). At the time when Pip is about to take the fateful journey to London he feels unsettled, and he feels the stars shine indiscriminately upon rich and poor, rustic and sophisticated: "At those times I would get up and look out at the door... The very stars to which I then raised my eyes, I am afraid I took to be but poor and humble stars for glittering on the rustic objects among which I had passed my life." (97). Estelle is associated with

bright and glittering jewelry which makes her appear more like a star: "Miss Havisham...had put some of the most beautiful jewels from her dressing table into Estelle's hair, and about her bosom and arms; and I saw even my guardian look at her from under his thick eyebrows, and raise them a little when her loveliness was before him, with those rich flushes of glitter and colour in it." (98). When Pip has come to realise what an ice-cold person Estelle is, and that he must not hope for her to love him, it was "with a depressed heart" that he walked about "in the starlight for an hour or more, about the courtyard, and about the brewery, and about the ruined garden..." (99).

As is usually the case with Dickens, the contrasting positive standards are important: this is contrasted with the warmth of Joe Gargery's fire, forge, hearth and home. In Barnaby Rudge the contrast is drawn between the indifference of sophisticated and glittering social life and the warm goodness and the brotherhood of the Maypole and the sturdy benevolence of Gabriel Varden. The stars are not deployed by Dickens as an accompanying image of Barnaby alone, they are not uniquely his, but they are introduced in the scene with Varden after Edward Chester has been robbed and wounded by Rudge. "He went out to-day a-wooing. I wouldn't for a light guinea that he should never go a-wooing again, for if he did some eyes would grow dim that are now as bright as - see, when I talk of eyes, the stars come out! Whose eyes are they? If they are angels' eyes, why do they look down here and see good men hurt, and only wink and sparkle all the night?" says Barnaby (100). Thus are the stars

presented to us as emblems of indifference.

Barnaby refers to this, when he tells his mother about "...the robber; him that the stars winked at..." (101). The indifference of Dolly to the stir she causes in young men's hearts is suggested by a reference to the stars: "It was a fine bright night, and...Dolly kept looking up at the stars in a manner so bewitching (and she knew it!) that Joe was clean out of his senses..." (102). The parallels with Great Expectations are obvious. (103). Dolly continues to examine the stars closely and - in the midst of a conversation with Joe to which she hardly pays any attention, although the poor fellow is trying to tell her what she means to him - suddenly she "found out a star which was brighter than all the other stars..." (104).

The stars are overtly used by Dickens to shadow forth the indifference of human beings to the basic and simple needs of human decency: "The thoughts of worldly men are for ever regulated by a moral law of gravitation, which like the physical one, holds them down to earth. The bright glory of day, and the silent wonders of a starlit night, appeal to their minds in vain. There are no signs in the sun, or in the moon, or in the stars, for their reading. They are like some wise men, who learning to know each planet by its Latin name, have quite forgotten such small heavenly constellations as Charity, Forbearance, Universal Love and Mercy, although they shine by night and day so brightly that the blind may see them; and who, looking upward at the spangled sky, see nothing there but the reflection of their own great wisdom..." (105). It is our

ability only to read in the stars what we want to see, and the stars inability to warn us or interfere further, which we must learn; he says: "The man who lives but in the breath of princes, has nothing in his sight but stars for fourtiers' breasts... to the money-hoarder and the mass of worldly folk, the whole great universe above glitters with sterling coin - fresh from the mint...coming always between them and heaven, turn where they may. So the shadows of our own desires stand between us and our better angels, and thus their brightness is eclipsed..." (106). Significantly, Sir John Chester, the soul of indifference, is associated in the novel with the images of glitter and sheen: "How the accomplished gentleman spent the evening in the midst of a dazzling and brilliant circle..." (107). We should also note that when Barnaby is led astray by worldly men, he sees gold in the sky. (108).

At the height of the riots, Dickens describes how the eyes of heaven look helplessly down on the work of men: "...The glare of the flames had sunk into a fitful, flashing light; and the gentle stars, invisible till now, looked down upon the blackening heap. A dull smoke hung upon the ruin, as though to hide it from those eyes of Heaven..." (109).

Although they cannot intervene, the eyes of Heaven may see what men do, with a powerless, indifferent eye: murderer Rudge tells Stagg that he could not keep away from the scene of his crime. "The act was not mine, I did it, but it was not mine. I was obliged to wander round, and round, and round that spot... As truly as the loadstone draws iron towards it, so he, lying

at the bottom of his deep grave, could draw me near him..." (110) Was it my secret? he asks "Mine? It was a secret, any breath of air could whisper at its will. The stars had it in their twinkling, the water in its flowing..." (111). Barnaby's mother begs the poor boy not to betray his father by recognising him, no matter what he has done. He stands rooted to the spot and then weeps. He looks out of the prison window and "the moon came slowly up in all her gentle glory, and the stars looked out; and through the small compass of the grated window, as through the narrow crevice of one good deed in a murky life of guilt, the face of Heaven shone bright and merciful..." (112). The eyes of heaven look pale upon the day that the rioters are to be hanged (113) and as Barnaby is led out to execution he exclaims to Hugh: "We shall know what makes the stars shine, now." (114).

The counter-balancing qualities of the good in human beings are also symbolised by Dickens. There is the goodness of Gabriel Varden, his benevolence, tolerance and exertions to help others: the positive standards are also implied by the character of Emma with her vital involvement in life, in activities and with living things: "It was the liveliest room in the building... Birds, flowers, books, drawing, music, and a hundred such graceful tokens of feminine loves and cares, filled it with more of life and human sympathy than the whole house besides seemed to hold. There was heart in the room..." (115). The human heart is thus opposed to the cold stars. Dickens tells us that Dolly has a heart too "and it was not a tough one either, though there was a little mist of coquettishness about it, such as sometimes surrounds that sun of life in its morning, and

slightly dims its lustre..." (116).

Human goodness is further presented in the figure of Haredale, brave, persecuted and maligned, (117) whom Dickens uses finally as an agent or a latter day Goel (118) to arrest the murderer Rudge and punish the evil Chester. The essence of Haredale's role in this last dreadful scene is in his denunciatory speech beginning "Attend to me again, Sir John..." (119), which is a catalogue of Sir John Chester's offences and has the tone of voice of an avenging angel. Haredale warns Chester not to provoke him and tear him from his better angel. (120). When Mr. Haredale goes to look at the ruins of his home, those same indifferent stars look down: "Mr. Haredale tied his horse to the trunk of a tree...(and) stole softly along the footpath, and into what had been the garden of his house. He stopped for an instant to look upon its smoking walls, and at the stars that shone through roof and floor upon the heap of crumbling ashes... not a tear, a look, or gesture indicating grief, escaped him..." (121).

What is the pattern of human behaviour that the eyes of Heaven observe? - It is devilish. Again and again, by constant references to devils, the devil, the nether world, hell and flames, Dickens builds up the impression of a society over-run by evil agents from another world. There is the obvious emphasis on darkness, storm, gloom: Rudge himself seems to be an evil maverick who wanders in from the realms of darkness. Above all there is the unmistakable reiteration of the theme of devils. This theme is first given out by the raven. The

novelist seemed to want to use Grip as an extension of the evil in human beings, as a kind of devil who has his master in thrall. "Barnaby being an idiot my notion is to have him always in company with a pet raven who is immeasurably more knowing than himself..." he wrote to Cattermole early in 1841. (122). "Do you see how he looks at me, as if he knew what I was saying?" asks Varden, impressed at Grip's obvious intelligence. (123). To which the bird rejoins "I'm a devil, I'm a devil." (124). This is the first direct reference to the spirits of darkness, but after this they fall thick and fast. "What the devil business has he to stop up so late!" asks the petulant Sim when Varden's habits seem not to coincide with his arrangements. (125).

The dreadful den run by the evil Stagg, where Tappertit and his cohorts meet, is called "the devil's cellar" by Sim (126) and "the floors were of sodden earth, the walls and roof of damp bare brick tapestried with the tracks of snails and slugs; the air was sickening, tainted, offensive..." (127).

Rudge the murderer seems to have sold himself to the devil (128), and he is quite explicit about this: "I, that in the form of a man live the life of a hunted beast, that in the body am a spirit, a ghost upon earth, a thing from which all creatures shrink, save those curst beings of another world, who will not leave me...past all fear but that of the hell I exist in from day to day...I will not hurt you. But I will not be taken alive; and so surely as you threaten me above your breath, I fall a dead man on this floor. The blood with which I sprinkle it, be on you and yours, in the name of the Evil Spirit that

tempts men to their ruin." (129). Thematically this is quite explicit. Mrs. Rudge is desperately anxious that father and son should never meet: "evil will fall upon him, if you stand eye to eye... Oh all good angels who know the truth - hear a poor mother's prayer..." (130). Rudge is only ever seen in darkness, and in damp and gloomy streets.

Gashford is described as having a face which might have furnished a study for the Devil's picture. (131). Even the graceful Sir John Chester has a demoniac role to perform: in talking of his admired Lord Chesterfield (on whom he so anxiously models himself) he says "any King or Queen may make a Lord, but only the Devil himself - and the Graces - can make a Chesterfield." (132). As Chester's character is revealed to us in his behaviour we come to learn that he really is more devil than man, so that Varden's appeal at the end of the novel for him to do something to save his natural son, poor Hugh, is couched in rending irony: "I take you for man, Sir John, and I suppose to some pleading of natural affection in your breast..." (133). But we know better, and expect little from such a devil. The perceptive Haredale has already told him that he had the head and heart of an evil spirit. (134).

Dickens early associates the mob, in our imagination, with the idea of devils. Lord George asks Gashford if he had moved the Protestants of Suffolk. "Move them, my lord! Move them!... they roared like men possessed - " (135). And later in the same chapter John Grueby says of the mob that "When we're indoors they come a roaring and screaming about the house like so

many devils..." (136). Hugh assures Sir John Chester that in order to satisfy motives of personal revenge, he would join the mob and "make one of 'em, if their master was the Devil himself ..." (137). And in this same scene Sir John Chester says to Hugh: "my devil-may-care acquaintance...really if you do not draw some nicer distinctions your career will be cut short with most surprising suddenness." (138). Later Hugh asks Dennis if he does consider him to be "a devil of a man?" (139) and demands in "the Devil's name" to be told what is in the proclamation from the King in Council about the rioters. (140). Hugh also refers to "Old Nick himself" (141) and is described by Joe Willett as one who has "the daring and devilry of twenty fellows." (142). The themes of devils and devilry are constantly repeated by the raven, who frequently refers to devils in the same breath as Protestants and cries of "No Popery!" (143). The mob is on the move, arrayed in stolen vestments and church ornaments, is described by Dickens as "a dream of demon heads and savage eyes..." (144). Varden questions Simon about the handbill which comes to his home and offers protection to true Protestants: "...What threat does it imply? What devil is abroad;" "A fiery devil," Sim retorts, "a flaming, furious devil. Don't you put yourself in its way, or you'll be done for..." (145). One of the sergeants comments that "The devil's loose in London somewhere." (146). The crowd in their work of destruction at the Warren are given devilish colour, "demon labourers" they are called: "The more the fire crackled and raged, the wilder and more cruel the men grew; as though moving in that element they became fiends and changed their earthly nature for the qualities that give delight in hell." The crowd are collectively called

"an army of devils" (147). The burning of the prison has throughout the atmosphere of the Inferno. (148). The burning of Newgate is termed "an infernal Christening" (149).

The theme of devilry is also carried in the person of poor mad Barnaby, as has been argued by Jack Lindsay (150) in the old-fashioned sense of "mad" being understood as "possessed by evil spirits" (151). When Barnaby re-enters London after his brief period in the peace of the country, "it seemed peopled by a legion of devils" (152). At the end of the riots Stagg prays that these good times have not really come to an end, and says "Devil send that the sport's not over yet..." (153). Even the good Haredale has to be strong to resist the devil within his own person, although his blood rose against Chester, Dickens tells us that "to resist the Devil who poured such hot temptation in his brain, required an effort scarcely human..." (154).

We seem to have a fairly persistent set of symbols, arranged in various groups, associated with certain ideas, which hold the novel together and give it, as well as added imaginative dimension, a symbolic wholeness: the evil in human beings is presented by the emblem of the Devil and devils, the rough, animal side of human nature by the beast imagery which permeates Hugh and the dark, slimy aura of murderer Rudge; the pure and the good is presented in the innocence of Barnaby and the birds, flowers, music of Emma; the reckless violence of the crowd is pictured forth in the elemental images of flood, fire and tumult; the value of the family as a bulwark against social disintegration symbolised in the paternalism of Varden which is

celebrated with the expected Dickensian ritual of good eating. Many authorities have suggested that this structural-symbolic element in Dickens' art is a late development, post Dombey and Son at the earliest, and that its very development shows a transformation hardly hinted at in his earlier novels. (155). But I find that this almost poetic quality is present in the novels of the early 1840's. The more we ponder the symbolic elements in his work, the nearer we come to understanding what he wrote.

The child figure we meet so often in mythology has great strengths - usually as a direct result of his lack of guile and his piercing innocence - but with this innocence goes the ever present danger of betrayal and destruction. Barnaby also shares this quality. He loves his mother and wants her to be happy. He believes that money could make her happy. He imagines that he sees gold in the sky. How can he get gold? Then, with what Robert Donington has called "the extreme promptness and punctuality of mythological events, which are not governed by time or distance but call one another up by inward necessity (156) the blind Stagg suddenly appears "bareheaded, behind the hedge that divided their patch of garden from the pathway." (157). We do not see him come, he is just suddenly there. Stagg tells Mrs. Rudge that if Barnaby is prepared "to try his fortune in a little change and bustle" in London, he could become rich. He later tells Barnaby that his mother would be happier if she was richer. "Why, so I tell her" the innocent boy answers, "the very thing I told her just before you came tonight, when all that gold was in the sky... Tell me, is there any way of being rich, that I could find out?" (158).

The Perceval-like guilelessness is about to betray him. Stagg tells him there are a hundred ways to become rich, but they are not to be found with stay-at-homes. Barnaby assures him that he is no stay-at-home, but that he spends all his time out of doors, in the fields, hills, valleys, at all hours. "But I never find it. Tell me where it is. I'd go there, if the journey were a whole year long, because I know she would be happier when I came home and brought some with me..." (159). "It's in the world, bold Barnaby, the merry world; not in solitary places like those you pass your time in, but in crowds." Thus he is tempted to seek life in the city.

Almost at the opening of the book Dickens had firmly presented to the mind of the reader a portrait of London, the big city, as a modern Labyrinth. Varden is on his way home: "...now he approached the great city, which lay outstretched before him like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the sluggish air with a deep dull light, that told of labyrinths of public ways and shops, and swarms of busy people. Approaching nearer and nearer yet, this halo began to fade... Long lines of poorly lighted streets might be faintly traced, with here and there a lighter spot, where lamps were clustered about a square or market...after a time, these grew more distinct, and the lamps themselves were visible, slight yellow specks... Then sounds arose...then noise swelled into a louder sound...and London - visible in the darkness by its own faint light, and not by the light of heaven - was at hand." (160). We note here the emphasis on darkness, gloom, bustle, the maze of streets, shadow, noise - and finally that it is not illumined by the light of

heaven. Elsewhere we learn the city is "iron-hearted" and dark: "(the most familiar walks) were...one and all, from the broadest and best to the narrowest and least frequented, very dark." (161). This is where Barnaby is convinced he will find gold. "He's a wise man," Barnaby says of Stagg when he is on the way to London with his mother, "What was it that he said of crowds? That gold was to be found where people crowded, and not among the trees and in such quiet places? He spoke as if he loved it; London is a crowded place; I think we shall meet him there"(162), and it is therefore quite understandable that he mistakes the Gordon rioters for the crowd he is seeking, where he will find his gold. (163).

At the scenes of riot, Barnaby leans on his staff and looks towards the declining sun "reflecting with a smile that he stood sentinel at that moment over buried gold." (164). The crowd is described in terms of fire, tumult, uncontrollable elements, darkness-- this was the crowd Barnaby came to seek. When he is arrested, guarding the loot (most of it gold ornaments stolen from churches) the air seems stale about him. (165). Peace only returns to him when he finds shelter at a pastoral hut in Finchley (166) with a simple, rural, diet of bread and milk. (167). His innate good nature compels him to look after his father: the strange promptings of nature "taught him to be sorry when they looked upon his haggard face...fanning him with leaves, soothing him when he started in his sleep..." (168) and he waits for his mother to turn up, and complete the family unit: the town to which he returns is peopled by devils. (169). He dreams of his peaceful, natural life in the country "...blithe mornings when

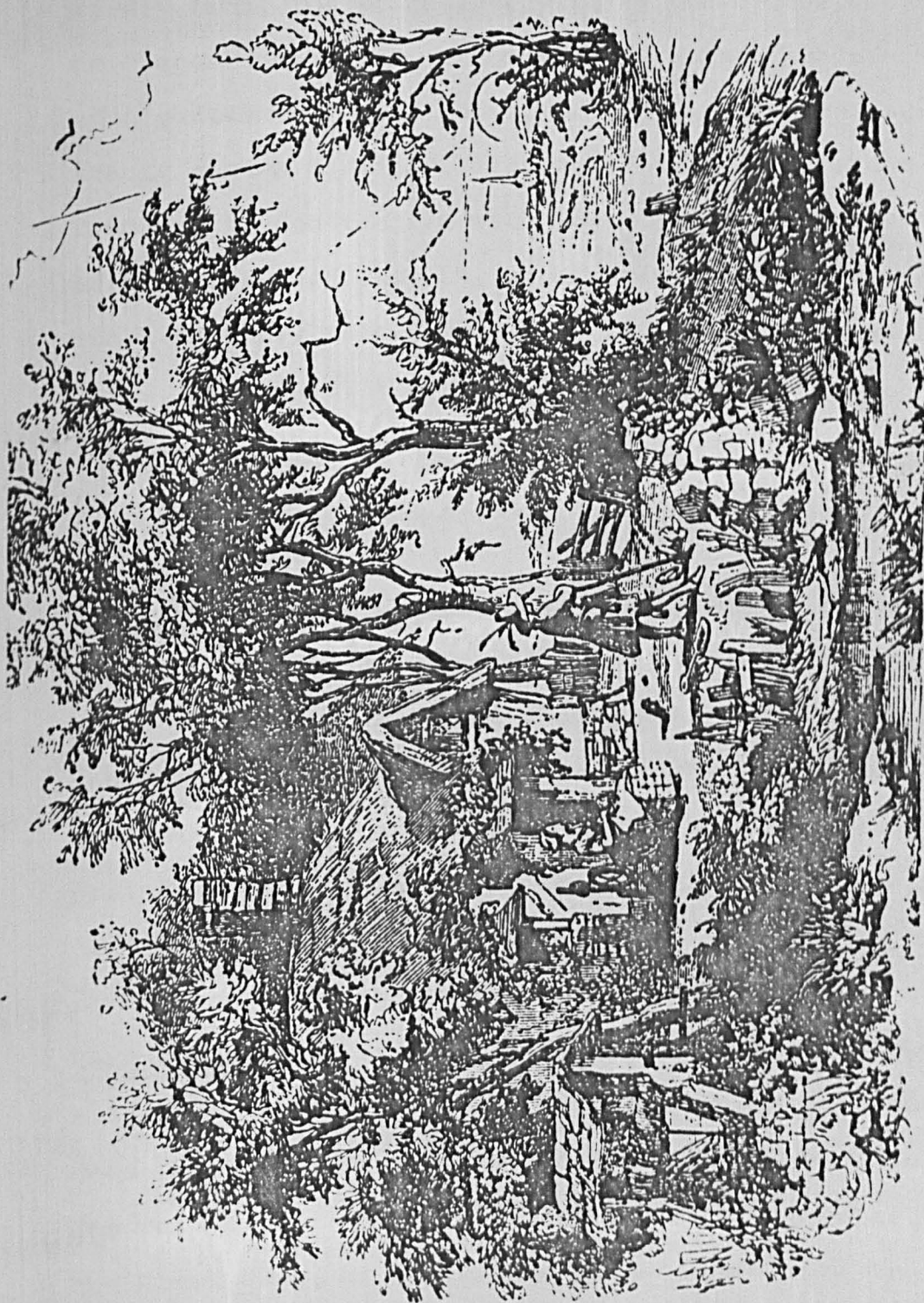
he and the dogs went bounding on together through the woods and fields..." (170). We are told at the very end of the book that Barnaby "never could be tempted into London" but lived "with his old mother on the Maypole farm, tending the poultry and the cattle, working in a garden of his own, and helping everywhere. He was known to every bird and beast about the place... Never was there a lighter hearted husbandman, a creature more popular with young and old...a more happy soul than Barnaby: and though he was free to ramble where he would, he never quitted her, but was for evermore her stay and comfort." (171).

Barnaby is in a long line of characters that form so marked a feature of Dickens' work: the natural fool who, renouncing the values of the modern world, is wiser than the sophisticated people. They seem not of this world, but they see through this world well enough. Martin Chuzzlewit realizes that Mark Tapley's ignorance is wiser than some men's enlightenment, as he sees through Pecksniff and understands the failings of young Martin. "Yet you are an ignorant man, you say?" "Very much so," Mr. Tapley replied. "And I a learned, well-instructed man, you think?" "Likewise very much so," Mr. Tapley answered. (172). It is the "foolish" Toots who has the shrewdest view of the real situation at the Dombey household. (173). It is the simple Joe Gargery who has the sanest view of human values, yet Jaggers looks at him as if he were "the village idiot" and Pip was his keeper. (174). In Our Mutual Friend it is the innane Twemlow, who is so dazzled by the complications of social life that he says to himself in the privacy of his lodgings: "I must not think of this. This is enough to soften any man's brain" (175)

Barnaby in the country with his Mother.

"Their poor cottage had known no stranger's foot since they sought the shelter of its roof five years before; nor had they in all that time held any commerce or communication with the old world from which they had fled..."

Barnaby Rudge Chapter 45.



and who is used by the Veneerings as an extra leaf to their dining table - it is he, who alone has the courage to speak wisely among the scandal mongers at the end of the novel: "I am disposed to think...that this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman." "A gentleman can have no feelings who contracts such a marriage," flushes Podsnap. "Pardon me," says Twemlow, "I don't agree with you. If this gentleman's feelings of gratitude, of respect, of admiration, and affection, induced him...to marry this lady - " "This lady!" echoes Podsnap. "Sir...you repeat the word; I repeat the word. This lady. What else would you call her, if the gentleman were present?" (176).

Thus Barnaby's simple goodness survives the city taint, and we leave him a happy, free and lasting help and comfort to his mother. He carries one of the main themes of the novel and has a central importance in Barnaby Rudge, he seems to stand for love, loyalty and purity. The "knowing" seldom receive praise in Dickens' world.

Strange mixture of originality and imitation as it is then, Barnaby Rudge is an important stage in Dickens' development as a literary artist. It is a study of human wickedness which does not shrink from admitting there are no easy solutions. The earlier Dickens had created characters such as Mr. Brownlow, the Cheerybles, Mr. Pickwick - who seemed to be the agents of a benign and other-worldly power. These figures are absent from Barnaby Rudge. (Varden is the nearest we get to this figure and he distributes gold to Joe and Dolly after the tragedies of

the book are over.) In The Old Curiosity Shop the gold-laden rescuer arrives too late to save Old Trent and Little Nell. Now Dickens sees that men may be evil, the innocent may suffer, and the eyes of Heaven may be cold and indifferent.

C H A P T E R N I N E
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THE MOB AND ITS LEADERS

"It's always best on these occasions to do what the mob do."

"But suppose there are two mobs?"

"Shout with the largest," replied Mr. Pickwick.

Pickwick Papers Chap.XIII.

Is Dickens' view of the mob ambiguous? It seems to be quite explicit in this novel. Here the mob are associated with violence, destruction and irresponsible behaviour; they are easily led by cynical, middle-class agitators who want to use them for their own ends. (1).

The great social enemy in this situation, Dickens seems to be saying, is ignorance. It is their ignorance which allows the mob to be led on. Throughout Barnaby Rudge Dickens associates the crowd with darkness and ignorance. Much of it is set at night. London is presented as a dark, gloomy, iron-hearted place - the tenebrous labyrinth, breeding discontent. The world of the rioters is swarming with devils, real and metaphoric. Pervading all, is the false religious cry Dickens discusses in the Preface, the cause few understand, and which the leaders pervert to their own distorted ambitions: "...the worst passions of the worst men were thus working in the dark, and the mantle of religion, assumed to cover the ugliest deformities, (and) threatened to become the shroud of all was good and peaceful in society..." (2). The ostensible cause of the rising is of little moment to some of the leaders. Lord George Gordon himself is a special case, and an interesting study, his presentation in the novel needs some pondering; but Tappertit and Gashford seem to represent the malcontented, lobbying anarchists which the novelist so loathed among his contemporary political "reformers". The attraction of this vague anarchy to the mass of people, Dickens tries to show, lies in the mysterious way it is presented: "To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery, is to invest it with a secret charm, and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests,

false prophets, false doctors, false patriots...veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity..." (3). Later he indicates that it was the rumours attendant on the No Popery cause which really attracted the masses "vague rumours got abroad, that in this Protestant Association a secret power was mustering against the government..." and again the element of conspiracy spreading like a nocturnal contagion is stressed: "...all this was done...in the dark, and secret invitations to join the Great Protestant Association in defence of religion, life, and liberty, were dropped in the public ways...and pressed into the hands of those who trod the streets by night; when they glared from every wall, and shone on every post and pillar, so that stocks and stones appeared infected with the common fear, urging all men to join together blindfold in resistance of they knew not what...then the mania spread indeed..." (4). The associations of blindness, darkness and mania are significant. The Lord Mayor himself comes to believe that "there are great people at the bottom of these riots" (5).

The basis of Dickens' case is that the mob is dangerous because its irresponsibility and grievances can be used by agitators. In this respect Gordon is a very dangerous man because although sincere about his cause, he is deluded; but though deluded, he has an appeal to the people. I believe that the purport of Dickens' fable in Barnaby Rudge is that the greatest public enemy is indifference. Nobody cares about the people, nobody is interested in them, until the strange figure of Lord George Gordon appears on the politico-religious scene. The novelist

makes quite explicit Lord George Gordon's awareness of his own hold on the people, and idea of darkness, as a metaphor of the dark recesses of mind and motive is always present. "...The Protestants of Suffolk are goodly men and true. Though others of our countrymen have lost their way in the darkness, even as we, my lord, did lose our road tonight, theirs is the light and glory," says Gashford to Lord Gordon at the Maypole inn, after a day's recruiting. (6). This conversation is one of the most important pieces of evidence we are given in the novel indicative of Gordon's mental personality. Dickens seems to point out that he is at times unaware of what he does and says, but well aware of his hold on the people. "Did I move them, Gashford?" "Move them, my lord! Move them. They cried to be led on against the Papists...they roared like men possessed - " "But not by devils," said his lord. "By devils! My lord! by angels." (7). The devils are significant. Gashford goes on to tell Gordon what he said to the crowd, and to stress the power that Gordon had over them, Gordon questions him. "It's a great power. You're right. It is a great power... But - dear Gashford - did I really say all that?... It's a proud thing to lead the people Gashford." "By force of reason too," returned the pliant secretary. "Ay, to be sure. They may cough, and jeer, and groan in Parliament, and call me fool and madman, but which of them can raise this human sea and make it swell and roar at pleasure?" (8). And we notice here again that telling metaphor of the sea, the restless element, which agitators can raise at will. The secret of Gordon's power over this element, Dickens shows us, is his ability to make contact with these people; to go out to them, to reach them in a way no one else can, because no one else bothers. "And as we

are honest, true, and in a sacred cause, Gashford...and are the only men who regard the mass of people out of doors, or are regarded by them, we will uphold them to the last; and will raise a cry against these un-English Papists which shall re-echo through the country, and roll with a noise like thunder. I will be worthy of the motto on my coat of arms, 'Called and chosen and faithful'." "Called," said the secretary, "by Heaven." "I am." "Chosen by the people." "Yes." "Faithful to both." "To the block." (9).

Dickens is here completely accurate because he is showing at this early stage of Gordon's career, signs of that mental derangement which toppled his sanity at the end of his life. The novelist adds this comment of their conversation: "It would be difficult to convey an adequate idea of the excited manner in which he gave these answers to the secretary's promptings; of the rapidity of his utterance, or the violence of his tone and gesture; in which, struggling through his Puritan's demeanour, was something wild and ungovernable which broke through all restraint. For some minutes he walked rapidly up and down the room..." (10). There is evidence that Gordon showed signs of madness at this stage of his career. It was quite widely rumoured that Lord George Gordon was mad long before he "officially" went insane. A diarist writing in January 1780 records that it was said Gordon was "a fool and a madman and that the Association (would) come to nothing in the end." (11).

Other evidence of Gordon's character is provided by Sir Nathaniel Wraxall (1751-1831) who published in 1815 Historical

Memoirs of my Own Time 1772-1784. These contain portraits of minor political characters which are of considerable historical value. (12). Wraxall knew Gordon personally and well. His view of that strange figure is almost as favourable as Dickens': "It will always remain disputable whether ambition, fanaticism, or alienation of mind contributed most to the part which Gordon acted in assembling and inciting the people to acts of violence. That he was not insensible to the political consideration and importance which he obtained from his personal influence over so vast a multitude cannot be questioned" he wrote. Gordon then, was certainly aware of his hold over the people, and seemed secretly rather to enjoy it. (13). "To religious enthusiasm or conviction some share may perhaps be fairly attributed, but more must be laid to the deranged state of his understanding, though no circumstance in his conduct or deportment could possibly subject him to be considered as insane. He appears in fact to have been perfectly master of himself, and in possession of all his faculties during every stage of the riots; nor is it to be imagined that he either foresaw or intended any of the excesses which were committed after the 2nd of June. But he has put in motion a machine of which he could not regulate or restrain the movements; and unquestionably the mob which set fire to London was of a far more savage as well as atrocious description than the original assemblage of people who met in St. George's Fields." (14). Gordon set in motion a destructive machine which he could not control. Was he mad? Although Wraxall cannot accept the theory of his early insanity, he comments on a "something in his cast of countenance that indicated cunning, or a perverted understanding, or both..." (15).

The German novelist Sophie von Laroche (1730-1807) met Lord George Gordon in London in 1786 and gives an account of him in her diary. She seems to have been a courageous lady, for she asked him directly how he could - with his gentle mien - have been responsible for the deaths of so many hundreds of London's inhabitants "and for bringing misfortune to hundreds of others?" Gordon's reply, delivered, she tells us, with an expression of deep grief, is very revealing: "Ah! madam, that was not my fault, nor was it my intention; but when the English mob is once roused to ire it can no longer be restrained." (16). She also claims that the facts and figures of the riots were so terrible that the government suppressed them. William Hickey records in his Memoirs that he knew Gordon well. "This most extraordinary event, which struck the inhabitants of London with horror and dismay, originated in the fanaticism, or perhaps it would be more candid and nearer the truth to say in the insanity of Lord George Gordon..." (17). Hickey says that Gordon's madness was aided and abetted by the willingness of the mob, and the laxity of the authorities: "While looking on and expressing my surprise that such excesses could have been committed in the very heart of the metropolis, the coachman, who had witnessed some of the outrages, assured me that at the commencement none were engaged in it but a parcel of the most abandoned women and boys of from ten to fifteen years old, and, he was convinced, twenty resolute men might have dispersed the whole, but everyone seemed helpless and inactive, from which, and the mob finding themselves unopposed, their numbers accumulated, being joined by pickpockets, horse-breakers, and thieves of every description. He told me that at midnight of the 6th of June he counted no less

than eleven dreadful conflagrations, all raging with the utmost fury at one and the same time..." (18). In other respects, in so far as we can judge on the evidence we have, the novelist is historically very accurate in the way he shows Gordon. From his preliminary reading of Watson's Life of Lord George Gordon (19) Dickens would have learned of Gordon's apparently sincere love of the poor and the underprivileged. While stationed with the army in America as a young man, Watson says, "he had an occasion of making the tour of that continent, and there he had an opportunity of indulging that natural predilection for equality and simplicity of manners, which distinguished his subsequent life... He soon perceived that in proportion as one man is exalted, others are depressed, and that the reason why the majority are so wretched, is, because a few revel in luxury, while the many perish through want..." (20).

The book ends with this tribute to Gordon's republicanism: "Thus lived and thus died Lord George Gordon, the enemy of tyrants, and the friend of the oppressed; a man of the strictest virtue, and the greatest philanthropy and the most unsullied honour." (21). Much of this, of course, is Gordon through Watson's eyes, and Watson was an extreme republican.

Dickens based the character of Gashford on Watson, who claimed to be Gordon's secretary. Many of Gashford's characteristics are Watson's; the oily sycophantism seems authentic, he "followed (Gordon's) fortunes with such touching and unreasoning fidelity" says Percy Colson. (22). Watson's long history of rabid trouble-making and radical republicanism Dickens uses in

Gashford, whose original went to Paris after his release from prison to be appointed Tutor to Napoleon Bonaparte, then contemplating a visit to England. As the "Chevalier" Watson he became Director of the Scots in Paris 1802-1808. (23). Gordon became a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and was "the sailors' friend" (24). He later resigned his commission because he formed a resolution never to "imbrue his hands in the blood of men struggling for freedom", (25). When he made a tour of the Hebrides he lived among the highlanders: "not in collecting shells...but in associating with the people... He wore their dress, talked their language, enquired into their wrongs, and by his gentle manners and attachment to their rural mode of life, became a great favourite of the Highlanders... Few visitants were ever received with more attention...none were ever more beloved..." (26). Gashford refers to Lord George Gordon as "The saviour of his country and his country's religion, the friend of his poor countrymen, the enemy of the proud and harsh; beloved of the rejected and oppressed, adored by forty thousand bold and loyal English hearts..." (27). It is worth noticing the accurate way in which Dickens has distilled the essence of Watson's admiration for Gordon into the character of Gashford.

Modern scholarship has tended to endorse this favourable opinion of Gordon's nature. (28). Gordon early came to the opinion that "reform can originate solely in the people..." (29). This is the Gordon which Dickens gives us, and this the secret of his magic hold on the people whom he rouses, his character a mixture of good-intentions, delusions and dynamite.

What is the message of the riot in this novel? And where does Dickens stand on this issue? It seems that we have an ill-educated populace who can be stirred into action and disorder: present as dangerous elements in society are malcontents such as Tappertit, the unfortunate Hugh and the half-sane Dennis, as well as the truly simple (such as Barnaby) who are easily led: we have powerful trouble-makers like Gashford (I know you, you're the man that blows the fire) who manipulate things behind the scenes: and we have the magnetic demagogues, such as Lord George himself, fired with a sense of public duty - however mistaken - and gifted with a strange, compelling attraction: the whole is a highly inflammable mixture of malcontentment, manipulation and mania. Dickens found it difficult to strike the right balance in his treatment of Gordon. He set out to show the social dangers of this kind of situation, but was at the same time anxious to present a fair and favourable portrait of Gordon. Forster objected to the favourable view of "this madman" as he called him. The novelist replied: "say what you please of Gordon, he must have been at heart a kind man, and a lover of the despised and rejected, after his own fashion. He lived upon a small income, and always within it; was known to relieve the necessities of many people; exposed in his place the corrupt attempt of a minister to buy him out of Parliament and did great charities at Newgate. He always spoke on the people's side, and tried...to expose the profligacy of both parties. He never got anything by his madness, and never sought it. The wildest and most raging attacks of the time, allow him these merits..." (30).

It is the evidence of John Grueby, whom I think we are to take as the voice of good sense in this novel, which gives us another clue to Dickens' attitude to Gordon and the rioters. "Between Bloody Marys, and blue cockades, and glorious Queen Besses, and no Poperys, and Protestant Associations, and making of speeches," he says behind Gashford's back, "my lord's half off his head. When we go out o'doors, such a set of ragamuffins comes a shouting after us, 'Gordon for ever!' that I'm ashamed of myself and don't know where to look. When we're in-doors they come a roaring and screaming about the house like so many devils; and my lord, instead of ordering them to be drove away, goes out into the balcony and demeans himself by making speeches to 'em, and calls 'em 'Men of Englan,' and 'Fellow-country men,' as if he was fond of 'em and thanked 'em for coming. I can't make it out, but they're all mixed somehow...with that unfortunate Bloody Mary... They're all Protestants too - every man and boy among 'em: and Protestants is very fond of spoons I find, and silver plate in general, whenever are gates is left open accidentally...if you don't stop these ugly customers in time, Mr. Gashford (and I know you; you're the man that blows the fire) you'll find 'em grow a little bit too strong for you..." (31).

There is also that interesting conversation between Grueby and Lord George Gordon on the question of Barnaby's sanity. This gives us further evidence of Dickens' view of the rioters as people possessed by a kind of mania. "Have you ever seen this young man before?" Gordon asks him. "Twice, my lord," said John. "I saw him in the crowd last night and Saturday."

"Did - did it seem to you that his manner was at all wild, or strange" Lord George demanded, falteringly. "Mad," said John, with emphatic brevity. "And why do you think him mad, Sir?" said his master, speaking in a peevish tone. "Don't use that word too freely. Why do you think him mad?" "My lord," John Grueby answered, "look at his dress, look at his eyes, look at his restless way, hear him cry 'No Popery!' Mad, my lord." "So because one man dresses unlike another," returned his angry master, "...and happens to differ from other men in his carriage and manner, and to advocate a great cause, which the corrupt and irreligious desert, he is to be accounted mad, is he?" "Stark, staring, raving mad, my lord" returned the unmoved John. "Do you say this to my face?" cried his master, turning sharply upon him. "To any man, my lord, who asks me ..." (32).

Here John Grueby, speaking in character, is really giving utterance to the point of view Dickens presents in the voice of narrator at the opening of chapter thirty seven: "If a man had stood on London Bridge, calling till he was hoarse, upon passers-by, to join with Lord George Gordon, although for an object which no man understood...the probability is, that he might have influenced a score of people in a month. If all zealous Protestants had been publically urged to join as association for the avowed purpose of singing a hymn or two...and hearing some indifferent speeches made, and ultimately of petitioning Parliament not to pass an act for abolishing the penal laws against Roman Catholic priests, the penalty of perpetual imprisonment denounced against those who education children in

that persuasion, and the disqualification of all members of the Romish Church to inherit real property...by right of purchase or descent, - matters so far removed from the business and bosoms of the mass, might perhaps have called together a hundred people. But when vague rumours got abroad,...when the air was filled with whispers of a confederacy among the Popish powers to degrade and enslave England, establish an Inquisition in London...and bygone bugbears which had lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt the ignorant and credulous...then the mania spread indeed." (33). The fears, Dickens goes on to say, were deliberately generated by Gordon, who was intoxicated by his success in minor disturbances in Scotland, and that he had tried to raise the masses before but had not succeeded: all that he needed to come to the fore and to be in a position where he could lead the masses in riot, was an issue - a fear he could implant in the public imagination, develop and conjure to immense proportions by playing on peoples' incredulity, fear, insecurity and prejudice. We who have seen Goebbels, Hitler, Mosely, Enoch Powell and the Reverend Ian Paisley stand in danger of immunity to Dickens' message through boredom, as this kind of illness is endemic in a society like ours. But Dickens' message is plain and valid.

The danger of such men lies in their ability to rise from insignificance to a position where they can rule the nation's passions: "So said...Lord George Gordon, the Association's president. Whether it was the fact or otherwise, few men knew or cared to ascertain. It had never made any public

demonstration; had scarcely ever been heard of, save through him; had never been seen... He was accustomed to talk largely about numbers of men - stimulated, as it was inferred, by certain successful disturbances...which had occurred in Scotland in the previous year..." (34). The point is made that Gordon was not a party politician, but was essentially a lone figure - the traditional voice in the wilderness - "(he) was looked upon as a crack-brained member of the Lower House, who attacked all parties and sided with none..." (35). And although this is in accordance with the known facts of Gordon's career (36) Dickens goes to some trouble to show that Gordon is an isolated, companionless demagogue, whom circumstances conspire to throw into prominence: "It was known that there was discontent abroad - there always is; he had been accustomed to address the people by placard, speech and pamphlet, upon other questions; nothing had come...of his past exertions ...and nothing was apprehended from his present...he had come, from time to time, upon the public, and been forgotten in a day." (37). It is the danger of these rabble-rousers to rise when the situation is ripe for them: at other times we may see them for what they are, vain, deluded, cranky, political nonentities - it is the old, old story - but their moment comes. They speak and seem to strike a chord in the nation's heart.

This is exactly the situation Dickens describes, and it is to this danger he points: "he and his proceedings (began) to force themselves...upon the notice of thousands of people... who, without being deaf or blind to passing events, had scarcely ever thought of him before." (38). This seems to me to

be the basis of Dickens' case in Barnaby Rudge, and it is a case which is helped by the vagueness of the actual issues which ostensibly cause the social disturbances.

Some critics point to the amorphous nature of the religious-political motivation of the riot scenes in Barnaby as if in some way they constitute an index of Dickens' failure to realise his intentions: thus Angus Wilson: "The whole religious division of the characters in the book seems lifeless and arbitrary. To have made this book his great novel about revolution, however ambiguous his attitude to it might have been, he would have needed some symbol for authority, some organization to represent the corruption of the forces of society...ultimately the goal cannot really stand for society - it has none of the political implications of the Bastille... In truth, the Gordon Riots had so little clear social cause (hostility to Catholic Irish immigrants by the London unemployed is given by modern historians, but was probably unknown to Dickens), and were so much a matter of incitement and pure riot that it seems almost as if Dickens chose them for the narrative of his novel in order to avoid the deeper issues posed by social revolution." (39). I think this view is rather misguided. Deceived into believing that Barnaby Rudge was some kind of trial run for A Tale of Two Cities, the tendency is to try Barnaby by the standards of that later novel, and to find the book wanting. Newgate is, it is true, not such a good symbol of political tyranny as the Bastille - did Dickens intend that it should be?

Scene during The Gordon Riots.

"There being now a great many parties in the streets, each went to work according to its humour, and a dozen houses were quickly blazing..."

Barnaby Rudge Chapter 66.



Dickens does not examine the social motivation of the riots in Barnaby - did he intend to? As a novel about revolution, it fails - but did its author set out to write a novel about revolution? These are, I think, so many false hares. If we put all presuppositions aside, I believe we can see the general direction of Dickens' interests in Barnaby Rudge. One of the major ones is certainly the danger of agitation on an uninformed populace. It is, I think, a mistake too easily to bracket this novel with A Tale of Two Cities: "Each...deals with a mass-movement, or rather mass-explosion, and reveals the powerful impact of Carlyle. Each owns as its central image the mass-destruction of a prison, Newgate or the Bastille..." says Jack Lindsay (40). There are of course, many obvious similarities, but these should not hide things which Barnaby has to offer. I believe Dickens spends much more consideration on the question of the leadership - the guidance - of social riot in Barnaby than in A Tale of Two Cities, and it is this which makes the earlier novel a continuing source of interest. It is interesting, too, in the Dickens oeuvre in that it is the first novel of Dickens which shows a wide social perspective; this makes it a "considerable step forward in his artistic mastery of the fictional world that he saw in the real world around him; it is the first broad-based picture persistent enough in narrative, and absolutely followed through in theme, to point forward to the later great parables of society" says Angus Wilson (41). With this I would agree, and it is partly in the considerable patience he has exerted in examining the question of leadership and mob violence that we can see how much Dickens' mastery of his art has advanced since the mid-1830's.

We note that the cause attracts the private frustrations and complexes of representatives from all sections of society: Simon Tappertit will not be satisfied until the whole of society is changed. He tells Mr. Chester "I scorn the Lord Mayor and everything that belongs to him. We must have another state of society, Sir, before you catch me being Lord Mayor... My life's a burden to me. If it wasn't for vengeance, I'd play at pitch and toss with it on the losing hazard." Gashford does not care what the "cause" is, as long as it brings him to power. Lord George Gordon tells him that he has dreamed he became a Jew and Gashford reflects "He may come to that before he dies. It's like enough. Well! After a time, and provided I lost nothing by it, I don't see why that religion shouldn't suit me as well as any other... For the present, though, we must be Christian to the core..." (42). We are meant also to notice the purposelessness of the crowd, who resort to playing aimless games when disappointed by having a shorter address from Gordon than they had expected; they "disperse into the adjoining fields, where they presently fell to pitch and toss, chuck-farthing, odd or even, dog-fighting, and other Protestant recreations..." (43). Thus from top to bottom of society, the supposed "cause" hardly motivates them - Gashford after power for himself in any convenient guise, Gordon deluded, and deluding: the frustrated Tappertit wishing to avenge himself on society as a whole, and the crowd who have nothing better to do. Thus does Dickens present the combustible material of social turbulence.

In one of the earliest scenes where we see the crowd in

action Dickens presents a very clear picture of the indiscriminate violence of the mob. I am referring to the scene in which Mr. Haredale is struck by a stone. The mob come "pouring out pell-mell" forcing Chester, Gashford, Gordon "on before them" and here we have that significant inference of the mob's water-like element, restless, unconstrainable, spreading.

"They were not silent, however, though inactive. At the first some indistinctive mutterings arose among them, which were followed by a hiss or two, and these swelled by degrees into a perfect storm..." This continues to image water, storm and turbulence. When Haredale is hit he turns on Gashford and what he says is revealing of the ideas of responsibility in the novel. "Dog, was it you? It was your deed, if not your hand - I know you." Thus the deeds of the mob are the deeds of the leaders. (44). Dickens begins chapter forty five of Barnaby with a description of the continuing agitation of the mob, which he bodies forth in the terms of "the worst passions of the worst men...working in the dark..." (45) - all these things might well become the shroud of all that was "good and peaceful in society." (46).

Here we have an associative series of images: passion, darkness, mantle, shroud; which seem to stand for evil feelings, ignorance, hypocrisy and death. Later Dickens expends several lines impressing the fact that the crowd takes on a corporate identity. They become one body, united in their misguided purpose. Barnaby and his mother watch them go by Westminster Bridge: "...the stream of life was all pouring one way...a vast throng of persons were crossing the river from

the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, in unusual haste and evident excitement. They were...in knots of two or three, or sometimes half a dozen; they spoke little together - many of them were quite silent; and hurried on as if they had one absorbing object in view, which was common to them all... ...every man in this great concourse, which still came pouring past,...wore in his hat a blue cockade...the chance passengers who were not so decorated appeared timidly anxious to escape observation or attack..." (47).

Again we notice the emphasis on the image of unruly water, the crowd pour, like a stream, resistless, undammed: all the various elements have lost their individual identity, and now merge into an anonymous crowd (with one absorbing object in view) and they all want to belong. Those who have not got the outward and visible badge of belonging, are frightened of being noticed. As A.E. Dyson has suggested, Dickens is here showing the frightening effect of crowd behaviour: "with its gravitational pull on whatever members of society are most uprooted, violent, mad and disruptive, (this) was a force he had come most of all to fear." (48). As the crowd gathers, and the numbers mount, Gordon feels himself truly called: "Gashford!" cried Lord George... "I am called indeed now. I feel and know it. I am the leader of a host. If they summoned me at this moment with one voice to lead them on to death, I'd do it - Yes, and fall first myself!" (49).

On the same page Dickens underlines the falsity of the religious cry in the mob, the mob which the demented Lord George

feels divinely inspired to lead onto death, "those who were banded together to support the religion of their country, even unto death, had never heard a hymn or psalm in all their lives. But these fellows having for the most part strong lungs, and being naturally fond of singing, chanted any ribaldry or nonsense that occurred to them, feeling pretty certain that it would not be detected in the general chorus, and not caring much if it were..." (50). When the crowd assembles at the Houses of Parliament it is described as moving "as on a great wave to the very doors of the gallery" (51) and composed, except for a few zealots, "of the very scum and refuse of London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police." (52). Members of both Houses are mishandled as they try to gain entry and "The mob raged and roared, like a mad monster as it was, unceasingly, and each new outrage served to swell its fury." (53)

It is during this scene, where Gordon and Gashford have led the crowd to Parliament believing that their petition will easily be granted, that we are given another clear indication of Dickens' view of the rioters and their leaders in contrast to authority: he describes Lord George Gordon's manner of speech as "childish, irresolute and uncertain." (54). When General Conway and Colonel Gordon appear and confront the people, we are told that though they are not young men by any means, their attitude was "gallant and resolute" (55) and that their affect on the mob was to make them "falter and stare at each other." Some even consider giving up and going back home. A rumour spreads that the military have been sent for,

and the crowd withdraws. Here again we notice the significance of the water metaphors: "the throng poured out" and "the whole stream turned at once" and "the whole mass floated by degrees into the open street". (56). The military arrive, and Dickens stresses the patient and unwarlike way they attempt to restore order. The Riot Act is read, but few hear it. "After an ineffectual attempt to make himself heard, the magistrate gave the word and the Horse Guards came riding in among the crowd. But even then he galloped here and there, exhorting the people to disperse; and, although heavy stones were thrown at the men, and some were desperately cut and bruised, they had no orders but to make prisoners of such of the rioters as were the most active, and to drive the people back with the flat of their sabres..." (57). Here we see authority under provocation, acting with restraint and decorum.

The magistrate, emblem as he is of Buergerlichkeit, tries vainly in all the ways he knows, to get the crowd to disperse: troops are used as a last resort, and then are used with restraint. We are intended to note the contrast with the behaviour of the mob. "A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city." Dickens writes (58). "Where it comes from or whither it goes, few men can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain, more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel." (59). Again he is insisting on the parallel with the uncontrollable sea, with its pointless

violence, cruelty, motivelessness, ubiquiteousness. Part of the responsibility for what the mob does is that of those who have the power to stop the rioting and yet do nothing. This point is made by Dickens several times. The petition fails, the mob drifts aimlessly to violence: "Beginning with the private houses...they broke open the doors and windows; while they destroyed the furniture and left but the bare walls, made a sharp search for tools and engines of destruction, such as hammers, pokers... There was not the least disguise or concealment... From the chapels, they tore down and took away the very altars, benches, pulpits...from the dwelling houses, the very wainscoting and stairs. This Sunday evening's recreation they pursued like mere workmen who had a certain task to do, and did it. Fifty resolute men might have turned them at any moment; a single company of soldiers could have scattered them like dust; but no man interposed, no authority restrained them, and, except by the terrified persons who fled from their approach, they were as little heeded as if they were pursuing their lawful occupations with the utmost sobriety and good conduct." (60).

Movable furniture is burned in the street as well as the fittings and ornaments from Catholic churches. Gashford urges them to make better fires: "I would have you put some meaning into your work. Fools! Can you make no better bonfires than of rags and scraps? Can you burn nothing whole?" (61). This is to lead to the burning of Newgate, and the turning of parts of London into a sea of fire. Horace Walpole recorded that on the night of June 7th: "I remember the Excise and Gin

Act and the rebels at Derby and Wilkes' interlude and the French at Plymouth, or I should have a bad memory; but I never till last night saw London and Southwark in flames!" (62). After seven days of rioting a hundred houses had been damaged, £100,000 of damage done, two hundred and eighty five rioters were killed and a hundred and seventy three wounded. Over four hundred and fifty were taken prisoner and a hundred and sixty were later tried. (63).

As the riots develop and continue, Dickens shows how organization disintegrates. The mob acts on the spontaneous-ness of violation. The King's birthday, which is celebrated with peals of bells and the firing of guns, is treated by Dickens as a symptom of ordered social living - "every man went about his pleasure or business as if the city was in perfect order" (64) - and contrasted with the accelerating mania of the crowd, which has now gone too far to be forgiven. In contrast to the order and good sense of the average sober citizen, we have the impromptu activity of the rioters: "...from the moment of their first outbreak at Westminster, every symptom of order or preconcerted arrangement among them vanished. When they divided into parties and ran to different quarters of the town, it was on the spontaneous suggestion of the moment. Each party swelled as it went along, like rivers as they roll towards the sea; new leaders sprang up as they were wanted, disappeared when the necessity was over, and reappeared at the next crisis. Each tumult took shape and form from the circumstances of the moment; sober workmen, going home from their day's labour, were seen to cast down their baskets of tools and

become rioters in an instant; mere boys on errands did the like. In a word, a moral plague ran through the city... The contagion spread like a dread fever: an infectious madness, as yet not near its height, seized on new victims every hour, and society began to tremble at their ravings..." (65). The associated images are of confusion, torrents and mania and disease - all the enemies of a durable social structure. Here in miniature Dickens gives us the living symbol of the evil of such riot, in the person of the sober workman who, having put in his honest day's toil, is tempted to lay aside the tools of his trade and join the destructive elements. As the rioters approach the Maypole they are said to sound "not unlike the murmuring in a sea-shell. Now it grew louder, fainter now, and now it altogether died away. Presently - it came again, subsided, came once more, grew louder, fainter - swelled into a roar... All at once it burst with a distinct sound - the voices, and the tramping feet of many men." (66). And as they come to enter the premises they are "A dark mass, looming through a cloud of dust...shouting and whooping like savages... rushing on pell-mell..." (67).

By the time the crowd reach the Warren, where - I believe - the riot and destruction achieves a violence and apocalyptic height which surpasses even the Newgate scenes, the image of fire (68) supplements the now expected symbols of water: "flaming links were distributed and passed from hand to hand with such rapidity, that, in a minute's time at least two thirds of the whole roaring mass bore...a blazing brand" (69) but when several points in the house are forced "the crowd

poured in like water." (70). The flames later become a symbol of the madness of the whole action of the riots: "...the rioters had grown, with impunity...and helped to kindle a flame in London, the like of which had never been beheld, even in its ancient and rebellious times." (71). A flame which is at once real and symbolic. It is at this point that the crowd reaches the height of its power. It is too easy to place the emphasis on the burning of Newgate as the climax of the work. It is dramatic, too dramatic really, as it takes the attention off what is really happening. The climax of the mob's career is reached in the lines: "The crowd was the law, and never was the law held in greater dread, or more implicitly obeyed." (72). This is a completely consummated revolution, a social revolution far more fundamental and frightening than simple flames and violence. We have already been told that the crowd comprised the scum of London, but now the scum has risen to the top: Dickens has already likened the riots to a contagion, a dread fever - with all its implied associations of pollution, infection, pestilence, epidemic, corruption, inflammation, rottenness, septicaemia, a pandemic unwholesomeness - and now the fever reaches its climax. "By this time, the crowd was everywhere; all concealment and disguise were laid aside... If any man among them wanted money, he had but to knock at the door of a dwelling-house or walk into a shop, and demand it in the rioters' name... The peaceable citizens (were) afraid to lay hands upon them, singly and alone...when gathered together in bodies, they were perfectly secure from interruption... Business was quite suspended; the greater part of the shops were closed; most of the houses displayed a blue flag in token

Excesses in The Gordon Riots.

"I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burnt down Lord Mansfield's, and played the very devil. Another number will finish the fires...I feel quite smoky when I am at work..."
Dickens to Forster, 18th September 1841.



of their adherence to the popular side...even the Jews in Houndsditch, Whitechapel, and those quarters, wrote upon their doors or window-shutters 'This House is a True Protestant'. The crowd was the law..." (73).

Social roles are quite reversed: the rabble are on top, the law is in contempt, social intercourse is halted; fair trade, buying and selling is gone and has been replaced by menacing demand; the mob is everywhere and everywhere is supreme, while the citizens cower indoors behind their false protestations of faith; the real nature of the crowd is now revealed for what it is, brute force; order, law, civilized behaviour, freedom of conscience, the basic rights of citizenship, all these things disappear in a complex of anarchistic destruction. The disease in society is at its height, and heads straight for cauterization in the burning of Newgate.

Dickens shows here his immense sympathy with people, as the crowd move on towards the prison he enumerates their various motives. The majority in the party were those who had been conspicuous in the former proceedings, as well as "a great number of people who were relatives or friends of felons in the jail. This last class included, not only the most desperate and utterly abandoned villains in London, but some who were comparatively innocent." (74). Here we have not only pickpockets, and the relations of the lowest criminals, but outcasts from the world seeking to release others as miserable as themselves "or moved by a general sympathy perhaps - God knows - with all who were without hope, and wretched..." (75)

The actual burning of Newgate is a festival of pyrotechnic art: armed with a motley collection of weapons - iron bars, wooden clubs, crutches, axes, saws, knives, swords, pistols - but above all, armed with fire - lighted torches, tow smeared with pitch, Hugh, Tappertit and Dennis lead the way "Roaring and chafing like an angry sea, the crowd pressed after them." The images of fire and water now combine: the raging of the fire, when it reaches its climax, serves as a vivid parallel to the mania of the crowd: "...The women who were looking on shrieked loudly, beat their hands together, stopped their ears; and many fainted, the men who were not near the walls and active in the siege, rather than do nothing, tore up the pavement of the street... Not one living creature in the throng was for an instant still. The whole great mass were mad. A Shout! Another! Another yet, though few knew why, or what it meant. But those around the gate had seen it slowly yield... It burned fiercely. The door was red-hot... They vainly tried to shield their faces with their hands... The door sank down again...inside and out, the prison was in flames." (76).

Dickens maintains persistently the image of the oceanic nature of the rioters: as the fire dies down and the mob departs "the shouts and cries grew fainter...all the noises of the crowd subsided into a hoarse and sullen murmur as it passed into the distance; and when the human tide had rolled away, a melancholy heap of smoking ruins marked the spot where it had lately chafed and roared." (77). The destruction of Lord Mansfield's house by the mob is to be taken on two levels, I think: the level of its literal truth - the mob did sack and

burn it; and as a symbol of the total effects of mob violence to destroy utterly the accumulated wisdom of the past. Lord Mansfield's would be an attraction to the mob's violence because he was particularly disliked. Since 1767 he was associated with the cause of Catholic emancipation as it was in this year, as Lord Chief Justice he discountenanced prosecutions under the penal law of 1700 which had made the celebration of Mass by a Roman Catholic priest an offence punishable by life-imprisonment. His popularity with the people was further decreased in his handling of the trial of Wilkes in 1768, and his directions to the jury in the trial for seditious libel of the publishers of The Letters of Junius in 1770. (78). The mob began to demolish Lord Mansfield's house in Bloomsbury Square "with great fury... setting fire to it in several parts, involved in a common ruin the whole of the costly furniture, the plate and jewels, a beautiful gallery of pictures, the rarest collection of manuscripts ever possessed by any one private person in the world, and worse than all, because nothing could replace this loss, the great Law Library, on almost every page of which were notes in the Judge's own hand, of inestimable value, - being the results of the study and experience of his whole life..." (79).

This incident is interesting on two counts: it is the first moment in the course of the riots in which "authority" fights back, and it is a fairly rare example of Dickens' respect - almost love - for the wisdom of the past. He tended, usually to judge the past by the standards of the present and to find it wanting. While the rioters are whooping round the house in exultation a troop of soldiers and a magistrate arrive.

The Riot Act is read and the crowd's failing to disperse, they are fired into, killing six men and a woman, and wounding many others. Dickens does not seem to judge the military harshly. The second aspect is interesting, it could be that he is saying here that once the mob take affairs into their own hands the very standards by which we live and organize ourselves could easily be irreplaceably destroyed: the work of centuries obliterated in a few moments. (80). As Graham Smith has said (81) "For Dickens, the mob is not only almost always violent, it is also an entity that has a kind of mind of its own." But by this point of the riots, the actions of the mob begin to appear mindless, without relevance - almost schizophrenic in fact. (82). They are prevented from wrecking Lord Mansfield's country home at Caen Wood, and the various mobs "work according to (their) humour" (83). Houses of the justices of the peace are burned, some canary birds they find by chance are thrown live into the flames, and the poor little creatures screamed, it was said, "Like infants". "Meanwhile the Lord Mayor... looked on as an idle man might look at any other show, and seem mightily satisfied to have got a good place." (84). The citizens of London now hardly sleep at night at all. A stranger coming into the streets "would have supposed some mortal pest or plague was raging." (85).

Now the soldiers make their appearance to end the riot. Suddenly they are everywhere. Dickens does not detail the process of issuing warrants and giving orders; they appear uncalled, and take up their places. The fever has spent itself, the body politic has been ordered peace and rest, the

troops will keep all still while it is nursed back to health and normality. This is the mob's last upsurge: "...in half an hour...as though the setting in of night had been their preconcerted signal...the rioters rose like a great sea; and that in so many places at once...that those who had direction of the troops knew not, at first, where to turn or what to do. One after another, new fires blazed up in every quarter of the town...the crowd swarmed and roared in every street..." (86). The crowd, driven by the soldiers, pours in great streams. (87). Hugh, on a brewer's horse without a saddle, is described as rolling "like a boat upon the sea." (88). The burning of the brewer's premises and the other prisons are the final ragings of the fever. The fever produces at this stage a state of delirium. The parallel Dickens draws is accurate: a fever is a morbid condition where high temperature (fire) is the predominating symptom, and invariably the rise of the temperature is the measure of the severity of the disease; if the heat goes on rising, a fatal termination may be anticipated. What the novelist describes here, at the end of the riots, is the disease having taken its course, it burns itself out. "By this Friday night...the disturbances were entirely quelled, and peace and order were restored to the affrighted city... In a word, the crowd was utterly routed." (89).

But this is not the last appearance of the crowd in this novel: with a fine sense of drama Dickens introduces the crowd again at the scene of the public execution of the rioters at the end of the novel. He points out how the weakest, meanest and most miserable beings are the ones to suffer most from

affairs like this, and details the pathetic group who are to be hanged; crippled children, poor women, young people led astray. All the while the crowd, who cared nothing for these matters "fought and hustled to get near the gibbet before Newgate..." (90).

The major question which is bound to be asked in any discussion of the riot scenes in Barnaby Rudge, is what attitude does Dickens adopt to the rioters? Was he demonstrating his radicalism and showing sympathy with those who rebel? It is true that many of the rioters are poor, hard-done-by citizens who have much to complain about. But I think Dickens shows the act of riot in far too horrible a light for us to believe that. From the very beginning we are made aware of the serious threat to the basis of society: when Dennis enrolls Hugh to the "cause" he offers to stand godfather to him "if he was to be christened in a bonfire, made from the ruins of the Bank of England." (91) and he goes on to shout "Down with everybody, down with everything! Hurrah for the Protestant religion!" (92). But is Dickens here really recognising "more openly than in Oliver Twist the possibility of seizing the goods and status refused by an unjust society frozen in its privileges"? (93). Is his attitude, as Professor Miller suggests, ambiguous: "It is difficult to be sure of the degree of sympathy he extends to the Gordon rioters...he cannot help revealing his secret pleasure in the act of destruction itself, and his more open sympathy for the rioters after they fail and are about to be hanged..." (94).

For me there is no doubt of Dickens' intentions to show the evil horror of riot as a social solution: he shows us the evil nature of the leaders and discusses their motives, he shows us the more malicious elements in the mob itself as well as the gullible and inflammable general following, the scenes of riot are imaged forth in terms of elemental and uncontrollable violence. When the riots fail, the same mob turns out to see the leaders hanged, and we learn that - as always - it is the weakest who suffer; contrasted to this are the tolerance of the authorities and the good nature - under extreme provocation of the troops (95) and the emphasis the novelist places on the innate goodness and good sense of the ordinary people: after the early stage of the riots, even though there is much damage to places of worship "everything wore its usual aspect. Even the Catholic gentry and tradesmen...had no fear for their lives or property, and but little indignation for the wrong they had already sustained in the plunder and destruction of their temples... An honest confidence in the government under whose protection they had lived for many years, and a well-founded reliance on the good feeling and right thinking of the great mass of the community, with whom, notwithstanding their religious differences they were in every day habits of confidential, affectionate, and friendly intercourse, re-assured them..." (96). No, this work does not present a sympathetic view of social disturbance, it tends to side with the spirit of law and order, and to show social riot as a kind of diseased madness.

The whole course of the riots, in the imagery Dickens uses

to present the world of social disturbance, seems to encompass all human time, from the emergence of life from the waters, to the predicted end of the world in fire (97), the triumph of the flames: "the reflections in every quarter of the sky, of deep red, soaring flames, as though the last day had come and the whole universe were burning; the dust, and smoke, and drift of fiery particles, scorching and kindling all it fell upon; the hot unwholesome vapour, the blight on everything; the stars, the moon, and very sky, obliterated...it seemed as if the face of Heaven were blotted out, and night, in its rest and quiet, and softened light, never could look upon the earth again." (98).

This passage is bound to bring to mind the terrible passages in Revelations of the apocalyptic moment of fire, when the stars fall and sun becomes as black as sackcloth and the moon becomes as blood. The verbal parallels are close (99). The scene is at the wine-makers, and as the rioters drink themselves stupid, go mad and drink themselves to death, some dying of fire and drink "drawn, alive, but all alight from head to foot; who, in their unendurable anguish and suffering, making for anything that had the look of water, rolled, hissing, in this hideous lake, and splashed up liquid fire which lapped in all it met with...and neither spared the living nor the dead. On this last night of the great riots...the wretched victims of a senseless outcry became themselves the dust and ashes of the flames they had kindled, and strewed the public streets of London..." (100). The parallel with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is quite striking: in London the people, motivated by evil and debauched in behaviour, are consumed in fire

and smoke: "With all he saw in this last glance fixed indelibly upon his mind, Barnaby hurried from the city which enclosed such horrors; and holding down his head that he might not even see the glare of the fires upon the...landscape, was soon in the still country lanes." (101). I do not wish to push this similarity too far, or to seek any parallels with the story of Lot, the Moabites and children of Ammon, what interests me is the use of the ancient scriptural atmosphere to describe a wicked city, socially and morally sick, destroyed in fire and smoke. (102).